

THE EARTHLY PARADISE
IN TWELVE PARTS

**THE EARTHLY
PARADISE: A POEM
BY WILLIAM MORRIS**

**PART III
THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS
THE PROUD KING**

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O FAIR midspring, besung so oft and oft,
How can I praise thy loveliness enow?
Thy sun that burns not, and thy breezes soft
That o'er the blossoms of the orchard blow,
The thousand things that 'neath the young leaves
grow,
The hopes and chances of the growing year,
Winter forgotten long, and summer near.

When Summer brings the lily and the rose,
She brings us fear; her very death she brings
Hid in her anxious heart, the forge of woes;
And, dull with fear, no more the mavis sings.
But thou! thou diest not, but thy fresh life clings
About the fainting autumn's sweet decay,
When in the earth the hopeful seed they lay.

Ah! life of all the year, why yet do I
Amid thy snowy blossoms' fragrant drift,
Still long for that which never draweth nigh,
Striving my pleasure from my pain to sift,
Some weight from off my fluttering mirth to lift?
—Now, when far bells are ringing, "Come again,
Come back, past years! why will ye pass in vain?"

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

AND now the watery April sun lit up
Upon the fair board golden ewer and cup,
And over the bright silken tapestry
The fresh young boughs were gladdening every eye,
And round the board old faces you might see
Amidst the blossoms and their greenery.

So when the flutes were silent, and the birds,
Rejoicing in their flood of unknown words,
Were heard again, a silken-fastened book
A certain elder from his raiment took,
And said, "O friends, few words are best to-day,
And no new thing I bring you ; yet ye may
Be pleased to hear an ancient tale again,
That, told so long ago, doth yet remain
Fresh e'en 'mongst us, far from the Argive land :
Which tale this book, writ wholly by mine hand,
Holds gathered up as I have heard it told.

"Surely I fear me, midst the ancient gold
Base metal ye will light on here and there,
Though I have noted everything with care,
And with good will have set down nothing new,
Nor holds the land another book for you
That has the tale in full with nought beside,
So unto me let your good word betide ;
Though, take it as ye may, no small delight
I had, herein this well-loved tale to write."

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

ARGUMENT

ACRISIUS, king of Argos, being warned by an oracle that the son of his daughter Danaë should slay him, shut her up in a brazen tower built for that end beside the sea : there, though no man could come nigh her, she nevertheless bore a son to Jove, and she and her new-born son, set adrift on the sea, came to the island of Seriphos. Thence her son, grown to manhood, set out to win the Gorgon's Head, and accomplished that end by the help of Minerva ; and afterwards rescued Andromeda, daughter of Cepheus, from a terrible doom, and wedded her. Coming back to Seriphos he took his mother thence, and made for Argos, but by stress of weather came to Thessaly, and there, at Larissa, accomplished the prophecy, by unwittingly slaying Acrisius. In the end he founded the city of Mycenæ, and died there.

NOW of the King Acrisius shall ye hear,
Who, thinking he could free his life from
fear,

Did that which brought but death on him at last.

In Argos did he reign in days long past,
And had one daughter, fair as man could see,
Called in the ancient stories Danaë ;
But as her fairness day by day grew more,
Unto his ears came wandering words of lore,
Which bade him wot that either soon or late
He should be taken in the toils of fate,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And by the fruit of his own daughter's womb
Be slain at last, and set within his tomb;
And therefore heavy sorrow on him fell,
That she whom he was bound to love so well
Must henceforth be his deadliest dread and woe.

Long time he pondered what were best to do;
And whiles he thought that he would send her forth
To wed some king far in the snowy north,
And whiles that by great gifts of goods and gold
Some lying prophet might be bought and sold
To swear his daughter he must sacrifice,
If he would yet find favour in the eyes
Of the dread gods who govern everything,
And sometimes seemed it better to the King,
That he might 'scape the shedding of her blood
By leaving her in some far lonely wood,
Wherein the Dryads might the maiden find,
Or beasts might slay her, following but their kind.

So passed his anxious days, until at last,
When many a plot through his vexed brain had passed,
He lacked the heart his flesh and blood to slay,
Yet neither would he she should go away
From out his sight, or be at large at all;
Therefore his wisest craftsmen did he call,
And bade them make for him a tower foursquare,
Such as no man had yet seen anywhere,
For therein neither stone or timber was,
But all was fashioned of mere molten brass.

Now thither oft would maiden Danaë stray,
And watch its strange walls growing day by day,
Because, poor soul! she knew not anything

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

Of these forebodings of the fearful King,
Nor how he meted out for her this doom,
Therein to dwell as in a living tomb.
But on a day, she, coming there alone,
Found it all finished and the workmen gone,
And no one nigh, so through the open door
She entered, and went up from floor to floor,
And through its chambers wandered without dread ;
And, entering one, she found therein a bed,
Dight daintily, as though to serve a queen ;
And all the walls adorned with hangings green,
Tables and benches in good order set,
And all things new, by no one used as yet.

With that she murmured, " When again I see
My father, will I bid him tell to me
Who shall live here and die here, for, no doubt,
Whoever enters here shall ne'er go out :
Therefore the walls are made so high and great,
Therefore the bolts are measureless of weight,
The windows small, barred, turned unto the sea,
That none from land may tell who here may be.
No doubt some man the King my father fears
Above all other, here shall pass his years.
Alas, poor soul ! scarce shall he see the sun,
Or care to know when the hot day is done,
Or ever see sweet flowers again, or grass,
Or take much note of how the seasons pass.
Truly we folk who dwell in rest and ease
But lightly think of such abodes as these ;
And I, who live wrapped round about with bliss,
Shall go from hence and soon forget all this ;

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

For in my garden many a sweet flower blooms,
Wide open are the doors of all my rooms,
And lightly folk come in and lightly go ;
And I have known as yet but childish woe."

Therewith she turned about to leave the place,
But as unto the door she set her face
A bitter wailing from outside she heard,
And somewhat therewithal she waxed afeard,
And stopped awhile ; yet listening, she but thought,
"This is the man who to his doom is brought
By weeping friends, who come to see the last
Of that dear face they know shall soon be past
From them for ever." Then she 'gan to go
Adown the brazen stairs with footsteps slow.

But quick the shrieks and wailing drew anear,
Till in her ears it sounded sharp and clear,
And then she said, "Alas ! and must I see
These weeping faces drawn with agony ?
Would I had not come here to-day !" Withal
She started, as upon her ear did fall
The sound of shutting of the outer door,
And people coming up from floor to floor ;
And paler then she grew, but moved to meet
The woful sounds and slow-ascending feet,
Shrinking with pity for that wretched one
Whose life of joy upon that day was done.

Thus down the stairs with saddened heart she passed,
And to a lower chamber came at last ;
But as she went beneath the archway wide
The door was opened from the other side,
And in poured many maidens, whom she knew

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

For her own fair companions, leal and true ;
And after them two men-at-arms there came,
With knitted brows and eyes downcast for shame.

But when those damsels saw her standing there,
Anew they wept, and tore their unbound hair ;
But midst their wailing, still no word they said,
Until she spoke oppressed with sickening dread :

“ O tell me what has happened to me then !
For is my father slain of outland men ?
Or have the gods sent death upon the land ?
Or is it mine own death that they command ?
Alas, alas ! but slay me quick, I pray,
Nor let me linger on from day to day,
Maddened with fear like this, that sickens me,
And makes me seem the half-dead thing ye see.”

Then, like a man constrained, a soldier said
These cruel words unto the wretched maid :
“ Lady, lose hope and fear now once for all ;
Here must thou dwell betwixt brass wall and wall
Until the gods send gentle death to thee ;
And these as erst thine handmaidens shall be :
And if thou askest why the thing is so,
Thus the King wills it, for a while ago
An oracle foretold that thou shouldst live
To have a son, who bitter death should give
Unto thy father ; so, to save this shame
From falling on the glorious Argive name,
He deemed it well that thou shouldst live indeed,
But yet apart from man thy life shouldst lead.
So in this place thy days must pass away,
And we who are thy guards, from day to day

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Will bring thee everything that thou mayst need.
But pardon us, constrained to do this deed
By the King's will, and oaths that we have sworn
Ere to this life of sorrow thou wert born."

Therewith they turned and went, and soon the sound
Of shutting doors smote like a deadly wound
Into her heart; and yet no word she spoke,
But fell as one beneath a deadly stroke.

Then they who there her fellows were to be
Bore up her body, groaning heavily,
Unto the chamber whither fate had led
Her feet that morn; and there upon the bed
They laid her body, and then sat around,
With heavy heads and hair that swept the ground,
To weep the passing of those happy days
When many an one their happy lot would praise.
But now and then, when bitterly would sting
The loss of some nigh-reached and longed-for thing,
Into a wail their weeping would arise.

Then in a while did Danaë ope her eyes,
And to her aching forehead raised her hand;
But when she saw that wan, dishevelled band,
She soon remembered this was no ill dream,
But that all things were e'en as they did seem.
Then she arose, but soon upon the bed
Sank down again, and hid her troubled head,
And moaned and moaned, and when a damsel came
And touched her hand, and called her by her name
She knew her not, but turned her head away:
Nor did she know when dark night followed day.

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So passed by many a day in mourning sore,
And weariness oppressed her evermore
In that unhappy prison-house of brass ;
And yet a little the first sting did pass
That smote her, and she ate and drank and slept,
And fair and bright her body Venus kept,
Yea, such a grace the sea-born goddess fair
Did to her, that the ripples of her hair
Grew brighter, and the colour in her face
And lovely lips waned not in that sad place ;
And daily grew her limbs in goodlihead ;
Till as she lay upon the golden bed,
You would have thought the Queen herself had come
To meet some love far from her golden home.
And once it happed at the first hour of day
In golden morn upon her bed she lay,
Newly awakened to her daily woe,
And heard the rough sea beat the rocks below,
The wheeling sea-gull screaming on the wing,
Sea-swallows swift, and many a happy thing,
Till bitterly the tears ran down her cheek,
And stretching forth her arms and fingers weak,
Twixt moans these piteous helpless words she said :—
“ O Queen Diana, make me now thy maid,
And take me from this place and set me down
By the boar-haunted hills, that oak-woods crown,
Amid thy crowd of trim-girt maidens fair.

“ And shall I not be safe from men-folk there,
Thou cruel King, when she is guarding me,
The mighty maid from whom the shepherds flee,
When in the gathering dusk 'twixt day and night,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

The dead leaves tell them of her footsteps light,
Because they mind how dear Actæon bought
The lovely sight for which he never sought,
Diana naked in the water wan.

“Yea, what fear should I have of any man
When through the woods I, wandering merrily,
With girt-up gown, sharp sword upon the thigh,
Full quiver on the back, stout bow in hand,
Should tread with firm feet many a grassy land,
And grow strong-limbed in following up the deer,
And meet the lions’ eyes with little fear?”

“Alas! no doubt she hears not; many a maid
She has already, of no beast afraid,
Crisp-haired, with arms made meet for archery,
Whose limbs unclad no man shall ever see;
Though the birds see them, and the seeding grass
Harsh and unloving over them may pass,
When carelessly through rough and smooth they run,
And bough and briar catches many an one.

“Alas! why on these free maids is my thought,
When to such misery my life is brought?
I, who so long a happy maid have been,
The daughter of a great King and a Queen;
And why these fresh things do I think upon,
Who now shall see but little of the sun?”

“Here every day shall have the same sad tale,
My weary damsels with their faces pale,
The dashing of the sea on this black rock,
The piping wind through cranny and through lock,
The sea-bird’s cry, like mine grown hoarse and shrill,
The far-off sound of horn upon the hill,

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

The merry tune about the shepherd's home,
And all the things whereto I ne'er may come.

"O ye who rule below, I pray this boon,
I may not live here long, but perish soon,
Forgotten, but at peace, and feeling nought ;
For even now it comes across my thought
That here my wretched body dwells alone,
And that my soul with all my hope is gone.

"Father, thy blood upon thine own head be
If any solace Venus send to me
Within this wretched place which thou hast made,
Of thine own flesh and blood too much afraid."

Truly Diana heard not, for that tide
Upon the green grass by a river side,
Wherein she had just bathed her body sweet,
She stooped to tie the sandals to her feet,
Her linen gown upon the herbage lay,
And round her was there standing many a may
Making her ready for the morning chase.

But so it happed that Venus by the place
Was passing, just arisen from the sea,
And heard the maid complaining bitterly,
So to the window-bars she drew anigh,
And thence unseen, she saw the maiden lie,
As on the grass herself she might have lain
When in the thicket lay Adonis slain ;
For power and joy she smiled thereat, and thought
"She shall not suffer all this pain for nought."
And slowly for Olympus sailed away,
And thither came at hottest of the day.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Then through the heavenly courts she went, and
when

She found the father both of gods and men,
She smiled upon him, and said, "Knowest thou
What deeds are wrought by men in Argos now?
Wherein a brazen tower well builded is,
That hides a maid away from all my bliss;
Since thereby thinks Acrisius to forgo,
This doom that has been fated long ago,
That by his daughter's son he shall be slain;
Wherefore he puts the damsel to this pain
To see no man, and thinks to 'scape his doom
If she but live and die with barren womb;
And great dishonour is it unto me
That such a maiden lives so wretchedly;
And great dishonour is it to us all
That ill upon a guiltless head should fall
To save a King from what we have decreed.
Now, therefore, tell me, shall his impious deed
Save him alive, while she that might have borne
Great kings and glorious heroes, lives forlorn
Of love's delight, in solitude and woe?"

Then said the Thunderer, "Daughter, nowise so
Shall this be in the end; heed what shall fall,
And let none think that any brazen wall
Can let the gods from doing what shall be."

Now therewithal went Venus to the sea
Glad of her father's words, and, as she went,
Unseen the gladness of the spring she sent

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

Across the happy lands o'er which she moved,
Until all men felt joyous and beloved.

But while to Paphos carelessly she fared,
All day upon the tower the hot sun glared,
And Danaë within that narrow space
Went to and fro, and sometimes hid her face
Between her hands, moaning in her despair,
Or sometimes tore the fillets from her hair,
And sometimes would begin a piteous tale
Unto her maids, and in the midst would fail
For sobs and tears; but mostly would she sit
Over against the window, watching it,
And feel the light wind blowing from the sea
Against her face, with hands laid listlessly
Together in her lap; so passed the day,
And to their sleep her damsels went away,
And through the dead of night she slept awhile,
But when the dawn came, woke up with a smile,
As though she had forgotten all her pain,
But soon the heavy burden felt again,
And lay a wretch unhappy, till the sun
Drew nigh the sea's lip, and the night was done.

In that fresh morn was no one stirring yet,
And many a man his troubles did forget
Buried in sleep, but nothing she forgot.
She raised herself and up in bed she sat,
And towards the window turned round wearily
To watch the changing colours of the sky;
And many a time she sighed, and seemed as
though
She would have told the story of her woe

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

To whatsoever god near by might be
Betwixt the grey sky and the cold grey sea,
But to her lips no sound at all would rise,
Except those oft-repeated heavy sighs.

And yet, indeed, within a little while
Her face grew calm, the shadow of a smile
Stole o'er her parted lips and sweet grey eyes,
And slowly from the bed did she arise,
And towards the window drew, and yet did seem,
Although her eyes were open, still to dream.

There on the sill she laid her slender hand,
And looking seaward, pensive did she stand,
And seemed as though she waited for the sun
To bring her news that evil days were done ; .
At last he came and cast his golden road
Over the green sea toward that lone abode,
And into Danaë's face his glory came
And lit her softly waving hair like flame.
But in his light she held out both her hands,
As though he brought her from some far-off lands
Healing for all her great distress and woe.

But yellower now the sunbeams seemed to grow,
Not whiter as their wont is, and she heard
A tinkling sound that made her, half afraid,
Draw back a little from the fresh green sea,
Then to a clang the noise rose suddenly,
And gently was she smitten on the breast,
And some bright thing within her palm did rest,
And trickled down her shoulder and her side,
And on her limbs a little did abide,
Or lay upon her feet a little while.

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

Then in her face increased the doubtful smile,
While o'er her eyes a drowsy film there came,
And in her cheeks a flush as if of shame,
And, looking round about, could she behold
The chamber scattered o'er with shining gold,
That grew, till ankle-deep she stood in it.

Then through her limbs a tremor did there fit
As through white water runs the summer wind,
And many a wild hope came into her mind,
But her knees bent and soft she sank down there,
And on the gold was spread her golden hair,
And like an ivory image still she lay,
Until the night again had hidden day.

But when again she lifted up her head,
She found herself laid soft within her bed,
While midmost of the room the taper shone,
And all her damsels from the place were gone,
And by her head a gold-robed man there stood,
At sight of whom the damsel's shamefast blood
Made all her face red to the golden hair,
And quick she covered up her bosom fair.

Then in a great voice said he, "Danaë,
Sweet child, be glad, and have no fear of me
And have no shame, nor hide from thy new love
The breast that on this day has pillowed Jove.
Come now, come from that balmy nest of thine,
And stand with me beneath the taper's shine
That I may see thy beauty once again;
Then never shalt thou be in any pain,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

But if thou liftest up thy face to Jove
I shall be kind to my sweet simple love ;
I shall bethink me of thy body sweet,
From golden head to fair and dainty feet."

Then, trembling sore, from out the bed she came
And hid away her face for dread and shame,
But soon she trembled more for very love,
To feel the loving hands of mighty Jove
Draw down her hands, and kisses on the head
And tender bosom, as again he said,
"Now must I go ; and sweet love, Danaë,
Fear nothing more that man can do to thee,
For soon shall come an ending to thy woe,
And thou shalt have a son whose name shall grow
Still greater, till the mountains melt away
And men no more can tell the night from day."

Then forth he sprang and o'er the sea did fly,
And loud it thundered from a cloudless sky.

SO when her damsels came to her next morn,
And thought to see her laid alow forlorn
Upon the bed, and looking out to sea
Moaning full oft, and sighing heavily,
They found her singing o'er a web of silk
Where through the even warp as white as milk
Quick flew the shuttle from her arm of snow,
And somewhat from her girded gown did show

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

On the black treadles both her rosy feet,
Moving a little as the tender wheat
Moves in the June when Zephyr blows on it,
So, like a goddess weaving did she sit.

But when she saw her maidens wondering stand
She ceased her song and spake and stayed her hand,
"If now ye see me merry of my mood
Be nought amazed, for e'en as die the good
So die ill days ; and now my heart is light,
For hearken ; a fair dream I had last night,
That in his claws an eagle lifted me
And bore me to a land across the sea :
Wherefore I think that here I shall not die
But live to feel dew falling from the sky,
And set my feet deep in the meadow grass
And underneath the scented pine-trees pass,
Or in the garden feel the western breeze,
The herald of the rain, sweep through the trees,
Or in the hottest of the summer day,
Betwixt green banks within the mill-stream play.

"For either shall my father soon relent,
Or for my sake some marvel shall be sent,
And either way these doors shall open wide ;
And then doubt not to see me soon a bride
With some king's amorous son before my feet.

"Ah ! verily my life shall then be sweet ;
Before these days I knew not life or death,
With little hope or fear I drew my breath,
But now when all this sorrow is o'erpast,
Then shall I feel how sweet life is at last,
And learn how dear is peace from all these fears.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

"So no more will I waste my life in tears,
But pass the time as swiftly as may be,
Until ye step out on the turf with me."

Then glad they were, when such-like words they
heard,
And yet some doubted and were sore afeard
That she had grown light-headed with her woe,
Dreading the time might come when she would throw
Her-body on the ground and perish there,
Slain by her own hand mighty with despair.
Nathless the days more merrily went by
And from that prison men heard minstrelsy,
When nought but mourning, fisher-folk afeard
Who passed that way, in other times had heard.

Yet truly Danaë said that all things pass
And are forgotten ; in that house of brass
Forgotten was the stunning bitter pain
Wherewith she entered it, and yet again
In no long time, hope was forgotten too
When wringing torments moaning from her drew,
And to and fro the pale scared damsels went,
And those her guards unto Acrisius sent.

But ere the messenger returned again
She had been eased of half her bitterest pain,
And on her breast a fair man-child was laid ;
Then round the messenger her maids afraid
Drew weeping ; but he charged them earnestly,
Ever to watch her in that chamber high,
Lest any man should steal the babe away,

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

And so to bide until there came a day
When on her feet she might arise and go,
Whereof by messengers the King must know ;
So, threatening torments unendurable,
If any harm through treachery befell,
He left them, and no more to them he told,
But in his face the sooth they might behold.

Now therefore when some wretched days were past,
And trembling by the bed she stood at last,
She heard the opening of the outer door,
And footsteps came again from floor to floor,
And soon with all-armed men her chamber shone,
Who with few words now led her forth alone
Adown the stairs from out the brazen place ;
And on her hot hands, and her tear-stained face
Half-fainting, the pine-scented air she felt,
And all about the salt sea savour smelt,
And in her ears the dashing of the sea
Rang ever ; thus the God had set her free.

But by the shore further they led her still
To where the sea beat on a barren hill,
And a long stage of timber met the sea,
At end whereof was tossing fearfully
A little boat that had no oars or sail,
Or aught that could the mariner avail.
Thither with her their steps the soldiers bent,
And as along the narrow way they went
The salt waves leapt aloft to kiss her feet
And in the wind streamed out her tresses sweet ;
But little heed she took of feet or head
For nought she doubted she to death was led, .

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

But ever did she hold against her breast
The little babe, and spoke not for the rest,
No, not when in the boat they bade her go,
And 'twixt its bulwarks thin she lay alow,
Nor when adrift they set her presently
And all about was but the angry sea.

No word she said until the sun was down,
And she beheld the moon that on no town,
On no fair homestead, no green pasture shone,
But lit up the unwearied sea alone;
No word she said till she was far from shore
And on her breast the babe was wailing sore,
And then she lifted up her face to Jove,
And said, "O thou who once didst call me love,
Hast thou forgotten those fair words of thine,
When underneath the taper's glimmering shine
Thou bad'st me stand that thou mightst look on me,
And love thou call'dst me, and sweet Danaë?
Now on thy promised help to-day I call,
For on what day can greater woe befall
Than this wherein to-night my body is,
And brought thereto, O King, by thy sweet kiss?"

But neither did she pray the God in vain;
For straight he set himself to end her pain,
And while he cast on her a gentle sleep,
The winds within their houses did he keep
Except the west which soft on her did blow,
That swiftly through the sea the boat might go.

Far out to sea a certain isle doth lie
Men call Scirphos, craggy, steep, and high:

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

It rises up on every side but one,
And mariners its ill-famed headlands shun ;
But toward the south the meads slope soft
adown,

Until they meet the yellow sands and brown,
That slope themselves so gently to the sea,
The nymphs are hidden only to the knee
When half a mile of rippling water is
Between the waves that their white limbs do kiss
And the last wave that washes shells ashore.

To this fair place the west wind onward bore
The skiff that carried Danaë and her son,
And on the morn, when scarce the dusk was done,
Upon the sands the shallop ran aground ;
And still they slept, and for awhile around
Their wretched bed the waves sang lullaby,
But sank at last and left the long strand dry.

Then uprose Danaë, and nothing knew
What land it was : about her sea-fowl flew ;
Behind her back the yet retreating sea
Beat on the yellow sands unceasingly ;
Landward she saw the low green meadows lie,
Dotted with homesteads, rich with elm-trees high ;
And at her feet the little boat there lay
That happily had brought her on the way.

But as it happed, the brother of the King
Had ridden forth to hear the sea-fowl sing,
With hawk on fist, right early on that morn,
Hard by the place whereunto she was borne.
He, seeing far away a white thing stand,
Deemed her at first some maiden of the sand,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Such as to fishers sings a honied strain,
And leave them longing for their love in vain.
So, wishful to behold the sea-folk's bride,
He set the spurs into his horse's side.
But drawing nigher, he but saw her there,
Not moving much, her unbound yellow hair
Heavy with dew and washing of the sea ;
And her wet raiment clinging amorously
About her body, in the wind's despite ;
And in her arms her woe and her delight,
Spreading abroad the small hands helplessly
That on some day should still the battle's cry.
And furthermore he saw where by her side
Yet lay her ferry o'er the waters wide :
Then, though he knew not whence she might have
 come,
He doubted not the firm land was her home.

But when he came anigh, beholding him,
She fell a trembling in her every limb,
And kneeling to him held the young babe out,
And said : " O Sir, if, as I have no doubt,
In this strange land thou art a king and lord,
Speak unto me some comfortable word.

" Born of a king who rules a lovely land,
I in my house that by the sea doth stand,
With all my girls, made merry on a day :
Now some of them upon the sands did play,
Dancing unto their fellows' minstrelsy ;
And some it pleased upon sweet flowers to lie,
Ripe fruits around, and thence to look on them ;
And some were fain to lift their kirtles' hem,

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

And through the shallows chase the fishes fleet ;
But in this shallop would I have my seat
Alone, and holding this my little son,
And knowing not that my good days were done.

"Now how it chanced, in sooth I cannot say,
But yet I think that one there was that day,
Who for some hidden cause did hate me sore,
Who cut the cord that bound me to the shore,
And soon amidst my helpless shrieks the boat,
Orless and sailless, out to sea did float.

"But now that many a danger has been passed,
The gods have sent me to your land at last,
Alive, indeed, but such-like as you see,
Cold and drenched through with washing of the
sea,
Half-clad, and kneeling on an unknown land,
And for a morsel holding out my hand."

Then said he, "Lady, fear not any more,
For thou art come unto no savage shore,
But here shall be a queen as erst at home :
And if thou askest whereto thou art come,
This is the isle Seriphos ; and for me,
My name is Dictys, and right royally
My brother lives, the king of all the isle.
Him shalt thou see within a little while,
And doubtless he will give thee everything
That 'longs unto the daughter of a king.

"Meanwhile I bid thee in mine house to rest,
And there thy wearied body shall be dressed
In seemly raiment by my women slaves,
And thou shalt wash thee from the bitter waves,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And eat and drink, and sleep full easily,
And on the morrow shalt thou come with me
And take King Polydectes by the hand,
Who in good peace rules o'er this quiet land."

Then on his horse he set the Queen, while he
Walked by the side thereof right soberly,
And half asleep, as slow they went along,
She laid her hand upon the war-horse strong,
While Dictys by her side Jove's offspring bore,
And thus they left the sea-beat yellow shore.
And as one dreaming to the house she came,
Where in the sun the brazen doors did flame ;
And there she ate and drank as in a dream ;
Dreamlike to her the scented bath did seem
After the icy sprinkling of the waves,
And like a dream the fair, slim women-slaves,
Who laid her in the soft bed, where she slept
Dreamless, until the horned white moon had stept
Over the fresh pine-scented hills again.

But when the sun next day drave forth his wain,
The damsel, clad in queen-like gold array,
With Dictys to the palace took her way ;
And there by minstrels duly were they met,
Who brought them to the great hall, where was set
The King upon a royal throne of gold :
Black-bearded was he, thirty summers old,
Comely and strong, and seemed a king indeed ;
Who, when he saw the minstrels thither lead
Fair Danaë, rose up to her, and said :
"Oh, welcome, lady ! be no more afraid
That thou shalt lose thy state and dignity :

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

Yea, since a gem the gods have sent to me,
With plates of silver will I overlay
The casket that hath brought it on the way,
And set it in King Neptune's house to stand
Until the sea shall wash away the land.

"And for thyself a fair house shalt thou have
With all things needful, and right many a slave,
Both men and women; fair shall all things be
That thou mayst dwell here in felicity,
And that no care may wrinkle thy smooth brow.

"And for the child, when he is old enow
The priests of Pallas shall of him have care,
And thou shalt dwell hard by her temple fair;
But on this good day in mine hall abide,
And do me grace in sitting by my side."

Then mounted she the dais and sat, and then
Was she beheld of all the island-men
Who praised her much, and praised the sturdy child,
Who at their shouting made as if he smiled.

So passed the feast, and when the day had end
Unto her house did wearied Danaë wend,
That stood amid Minerva's olive-trees
Hidden away from moaning of the seas.

And there began fair Danaë's life again,
And quite forgotten was her ancient pain,
And peacefully did day succeed to day,
While fairer grew the well-loved child alway,
And strong and wise beyond his scanty years,
And in the island all his little peers
Held him for lord whatso might be their worth,
And Perseus is his name from this time forth.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

LO, eighteen summers now have come and gone
Since on the beach fair Danaë stood alone
Holding her little son, nor yet was she
Less fair than when the hoarse unwilling sea
Moaned loud that Neptune drew him from her feet,
And the wind sighed upon her bosom sweet.
For in that long-past half-forgotten time,
While yet the world was young, and the sweet clime,
Golden and mild, no bitter storm-clouds bred,
Light lay the years upon the untroubled head,
And longer men lived then by many a year
Than in these days, when every week is dear.

Now on a day was held a royal feast
Whereon there should be slain full many a beast
Unto Minerva; thereto the King came,
And in his heart love lit a greedy flame
At sight of Danaë's arms stretched out in prayer
Unto the goddess, and her yellow hair,
Wreathed round with olive wreaths, that hung adown
Over the soft folds of her linen gown;
And when at last he took her by the hand
Speechless by her did Polydectes stand,
So was he with desire bewildered
At sight of all that wondrous white and red,
That peaceful face wherein all past distress
Had melted into perfect loveliness.

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

So when that night he lay upon his bed,
Full many a thought he turned within his head
Of how he best might unto that attain,
Whose lack now filled him with such burning pain.
And at the first it seemed a little thing
For him who was a rich man and a king,
Either by gifts to win her, or to send
And fetch her thither, and perforce to end
Her widowhood ; but then there came the thought,
“ By force or gifts hither she might be brought,
And here might I get that for which I long,
Yet has she here a son both brave and strong,
Nor will he think it much to end my days
If he may get thereby the people’s praise,
E’en if therewith he shortly needs must die ;
Ah, verily, a purblind fool was I,
That when I first beheld that matchless face
I had no eyes to see her heavenly grace ;
Then with few words might I have held her here
And kept her for mine own with little fear ;
But now I have no will the lad to slay,
For he would be revenged some evil day,
Who now Jove’s offspring do I think to be,
So dowered he is with might and majesty.

“ Yet could I find perchance some fair pre-
tence

Whereby with honour I might send him hence,
Nor have the youngling’s blood upon my head,
Then might he be well-nigh as good as dead.”

So pondering on his bed long time he lay,
Until the night began to mix with day,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And then he smiled and so to sleep turned round,
As though at last some sure way he had found.

And now it chanced to come round to the day,
When all the lords clad in their rich array
Unto the King should come for royal feast;
And there the custom was, that most and least
Should thither bear some present for the King,
As horse or sword, gold chain, fair cup, or ring.
Unto which feast was Perseus bidden now
Who giftless came, bare as the winter bough,
For little was his wealth in that strange land.

So there ashamed it was his lot to stand,
Before the guests were called to meat, and when
He sat amidst those royally-clad men
Little he spake for shame of his estate,
Not knowing yet his god-like birth and great.

So passed the feast, and when the full time came
To show the gifts, he waxed all red for shame:
For through the hall white horses were brought up,
And well-clad slaves, and many a dainty cup,
And many a gem well set in brooch or ring,
And laid before the dais of the King.
But all alone of great folk of the land
With eyes cast down for rage did Perseus stand,
Yet for his manhood thence he would not go.

Now ~~so~~ that secretly were bidden so,
Beholding him began to gibe and jeer,
Yet not ~~too loud~~, held back perchance by fear,
And thus a murmur spread about the hall
As, each to each, ~~was~~ cast about the hall,

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

Which the King heard, or seemed to hear at last,
And round the noisy hall a look he cast,
And then beholding Perseus with a smile
He said, "Good friends, fair lords, be still awhile,
And say no ill about this giftless guest,
For truly not the worst, if scarce the best,
I hold him, and forsooth so rich I live
Within this land, that I myself may give
Somewhat to him, nor yet take from him aught,
And when I bade him here this was my thought."

Then stretching out his arm did he take up
From off the board, a jewelled golden cup
And said, "O Perseus, come and sit by me,
And from my hand take this, that thou dost see
And be my friend." Then Perseus drew anear,
And took the cup and said, "This shall be dear
Unto mine eyes while on the earth I live:
And yet a gift I in my turn may give,
When to this land comes bitter war, or when
Some enemy thou hast among great men;
Yea, sire, among these knights and lords I swear
To do whatso thou bidd'st me without fear."

Then the King smiled and said, "Yea, verily
Then wilt thou give a noble gift to me,
Nor yet, forsooth, too early by a day;
To-morrow may'st thou be upon thy way.

"Far in the western sea a land there is
Desert and vast, and emptied of all bliss,
Where dwell the Gorgons wretchedly enow;
Two of them die not, one above her brow

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And wretched head bears serpents, for the shame
That on an ill day fell upon her name,
When in Minerva's shrine great sin was wrought,
For thither by the Sea-god she was brought,
And in the maiden's house in love they mixed ;
Who wrathful, in her once fair tresses fixed
That snaky brood, and shut her evermore
Within a land west of the Lybian shore.

"Now if a king could gain this snaky head
Full well for war were he apparelled,
Because no man may look thereon and live.
A great gift, therefore, Perseus, wouldst thou give
If thou shouldst bring this wonder unto me ;
And for the place, far in the western sea
It lies, I say, but nothing more I know,
Therefore I bid thee, to some wise man go
Who has been used this many a day to pore
O'er ancient books of long-forgotten lore."

Thus spoke the King, knowing the while full well
None but a god of that far land could tell.

But Perseus answered, "O my Lord, the King,
Thou settest me to win a dreadful thing,
Yet for thy bounty this gift will I give
Unto thine hands, if I should chance to live."

With that he turned, and silent, full of thought,
From out the hall he passed not noting aught,
And toward his home he went but soberly,
And thence went forth an ancient man to see
He hoped might tell him that he wished to know
And to what land it were the best to go.

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

But when he told the elder all the tale,
He shook his head, and said, "Nought will avail
My lore for this, nor dwells the man on earth
Whose wisdom for this thing will be of worth,
Yea, to this dreadful land no man shall win
Unless some god himself shall help therein;
Therefore, my son, I rede thee stay at home,
For thou shalt have full many a chance to roam
Seeking for something that all men love well,
Not for an unknown isle where monsters dwell."

Then forth again went Perseus soberly
And walked along the border of the sea,
Upon the yellow sands where first he came
That time when he was deemed his mother's shame.

And now was it the first hour of the night,
Therefore within the west a yellow light
Yet shone, though risen was the hornéd moon,
Whose lonely cold grey beams would quench it soon,
Though now her light was shining doubtfully
On the wet sands, for low down was the sea
But rising, and the salt sea-wind blew strong
And drave the hurrying breakers swift along.
So there walked Perseus thinking many a thing
About those last words of the wily king,
And as he went at last he came upon
An ancient woman, who said, "Fair my son,
What dost thou wandering here in the cold night?
When in the King's hall glance from shade to light
The golden sandals of the dancing girls,
And in the gold cups set with gems and pearls

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

The wine shines fair that glads the heart of man ;
What dost thou wandering 'neath the moonlight
wan ? ”

“This have I done,” said he, “as one should
swear

To make the vine bear bunches twice a year,
For I have sworn the Gorgon's head to bring
A worthy gift unto our island King,
When neither I, nor any man can tell
In what far land apart from men they dwell.
Some god alone can help me in my need ;
And yet unless somehow I do the deed
An exile I must be from this fair land,
Nor with my peers shall I have heart to stand.”

Grim in the moonlight smiled the aged crone,
And said, “If living there thou com'st, alone
Of all men yet, what thinkest thou to do ?
Then verily thy journey shalt thou rue,
For whoso looks upon that face meets death,
That in his sick heart freezes up his breath
Until he has the semblance of a stone.”

But Perseus answered straightly to the crone,
“O Mother, if the gods but give me grace
To come anigh that fair and dreadful face,
Well may they give me grace enough also
Their enemy and mine to lay a low.”

Now as he spake, the white moon risen high
Burst from a cloud, and shone out gloriously,
And down the sands her path of silver shone,
And lighted full upon that ancient crone ;

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

And there a marvel Perseus saw indeed,
Because in face, in figure, and in weed,
She wholly changed before his wondering eyes.
Now tall and straight her figure did arise,
That erst seemed bent with weight of many a year,
And on her head a helmet shone out clear
For the rent clout that held the grizzled head :
With a fair breastplate was she furnished,
From whence a hauberk to her knees fell down ;
And underneath, a perfumed linen gown,
O'erwrought with many-coloured Indian silk,
Fell to her sandall'd feet, as white as milk.
Grey-eyed she was, like amber shone her hair,
Aloft she held her right arm round and bare,
Whose hand upheld a spear-shaft nigh the steel.

Unwonted trembling fear did Perseus feel
When he beheld before him Pallas stand,
And with bowed head he stood and outstretched hand.
But she smiled on him softly, and she said,
"Hold up again, O Perseus, thy fair head,
Because thou art indeed my father's son,
And in this quest that now thou goest upon
Thou shalt not fail : I swear it by my head,
And that black water all immortals dread.

"Look now before my feet, and thou shalt see
Four helpful things the high gods lend to thee,
Not willing thou shouldst journey forth in vain :
Hermes himself, the many-eyed one's bane,
Gives these two-winged shoes, to carry thee
Tireless on high o'er every land and sea ;

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

This cap is his whose chariot caught away
The maid of Enna from her gentle play ;
And if thou art hard-pressed of any one
Set this on thee, and so be seen of none :
The halting god was craftsman of this blade,
No better shone, when, making heaven afraid,
The giants round our golden houses cried,
For neither brass nor steel its edge can bide,
Or flinty rocks or gleaming adamant :
With these, indeed, but one thing dost thou want,
And that I give thee ; little need'st thou reck
Of those grey hopeless eyes, if round thy neck
Thou hang'st this shield, that, hanging once on
mine,

In the grim giant's hopeless eyes did shine.

“And now be strong, and fly forth with good heart
Far northward, till thou seest the ice-walls part
The weary sea from snow-clad lands and wan,
Untrodden yet by any son of man.

There dwell the Gorgons' ancient sisters three
Men call the Graiæ, who make shift to see
With one eye, which they pass from hand to hand.
Now make thyself unseen in this white land
And snatch the eye, while crooning songs they sit,
From hand to withered hand still passing it ;
And let them buy it back by telling thee
How thou shalt find within the western sea
The unknown country where their sisters dwell.

“Which thing unto thee I myself would tell,
But when with many a curse I set them there,
I in my wrath by a great oath did swear

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

I would not name again the country grey
Wherein they dwell, with little light of day.
“Good speed, O Perseus ; make no tarrying,
But straightly set thyself to do this thing.”

Now as his ears yet rung with words like these,
And on the sand he sank upon his knees
Before the goddess, there he knelt alone
As in a dream ; but still the white moon shone
Upon the sword, the shield, and cap and shoes,
Which half afraid he was at first to use,
Until the goddess gave him heart at last,
And his own gear in haste aside he cast,
And armed himself in that wild, lonely place :
Then turning round, northward he set his face,
And rose aloft and o'er the lands 'gan fly,
Betwixt the green earth and the windy sky.

Young was the night when first he left the sands
Of small Seriphos, but right many lands
Before the moon was down his wingéd feet
Had borne him over, tireless, strong, and fleet.
Then in the starlight black beneath him lay
The German forests, where the wild swine play,
Fearless of what Diana's maids may do,
Who ever have more will to wander through
The warm and grassy woods of Thessaly,
Or in Sicilian orange-gardens lie.

But ere the hot sun on his arms 'gan shine
He had passed o'er the Danube and the Rhine,
And heard the faint sound of the northern sea ;
But ever northward flew untiringly,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Till Thulé lay beneath his feet at last.
Then o'er its desert icy hills he passed,
And on beneath a feeble sun he flew,
Till, rising like a wall, the cliffs he knew
That Pallas told him of: the sun was high,
But on the bleak ice shone but wretchedly;
Pale blue the great mass was, and cold enow;
Grey tattered moss hung from its jagged brow,
No wind was there at all, though ever beat
The leaden tideless sea against its feet.

Then lighted Perseus on that dreary land,
And when on the white plain his feet did stand
He saw no sign of either beast or man,
Except that near by rose a palace wan,
Built of some metal that he could not name.
Thither he went, and to a great door came
That stood wide open, so without a word
He entered in, and drew his deadly sword,
Though neither sword or man might one behold
More than folk see their death ere they grow old.

So having entered, through a cloister grey
With cautious steps and slow he took his way,
At end whereof he found a mighty hall;
Where, bare of hangings, a white marble wall
And milk-white pillars held the roof aloft,
And nothing was therein of fair or soft;
And at one end, upon a dais high,
There sat the crones that had the single eye,
Clad in blue sweeping cloak and snow-white gown;
While o'er their backs their straight white hair hung
down

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

In long thin locks ; dreadful their faces were,
Carved all about with wrinkles of despair ;
And as they sat they crooned a dreary song,
Complaining that their lives should last so long,
In that sad place that no one came anear,
In that wan place desert of hope and fear ;
And singing, still they rocked their bodies bent,
And ever each to each the eye they sent.

Awhile stood Perseus gazing on the three,
Then sheathed his sword, and toward them warily
He went, and from the last one snatched the eye,
Who, feeling it gone from her, with a cry
Sprung up and said, " O sisters, he is here
That we were warned so long ago to fear,
And verily he has the eye of me."

Then those three, thinking they no more should see
What feeble light the sun could show them there,
And that of all joys now their life was bare,
Began a wailing and lamenting sore
That they were worse than ever heretofore.

Then Perseus cried, " Unseen am I indeed,
But yet a mortal man, who have a need
Your wisdom can make good, if so ye will ;
Now neither do I wish you any ill,
Nor this your treasure will I keep from you
If ye will tell me what I needs must do
To gain, upon the earth or under it,
The dreary country where your sisters sit :
Of whom, as wise men say, the one is fair
As any goddess, but with snaky hair
And body that shall perish on some day,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

While the two others ancient are, and grey
As ye be, but shall see the whole world die."

Then said they, "Rash man, give us back the eye
Or rue this day, for wretched as we are,
Beholding not fair peace or godlike war,
Or any of the deeds of men at all,
Yet are we strong, and on thy head shall fall
Our heavy curses, and but dismally
Thy life shall pass until thou com'st to die."

"Make no delay," he said, "to do this thing,
Or this your cherished sight I soon shall fling
Into the sea, or burn it up with fire."

"What else, what else, but this wilt thou desire?"
They said, "Wilt thou have long youth at our hands?
Or wilt thou be the king of lovely lands?
Or store up wealth to lead thy life in mirth?
Or wilt thou have the beauty of the earth
With all her kindness for thy very own?
Choose what thou wilt except this thing alone."

"Nay," said he, "for nought else I left my home,
For this sole knowledge hither am I come,
Not all unholpen of the gods above;
Nor yet shall words my stedfast purpose move."

Then with that last word did he hold his peace,
And they no less from wailing words did cease,
Hoping that in that silence he might think
Of their dread words and from the evils shrink
Wherewith they threatened him; but in his heart
Most godlike courage fit for such a part
The white-armed goddess of the loom had set,
Nor in that land her help did he forget.

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

Withal, when many an hour had now gone by,
Together did the awesome sisters cry,
"O man! O man! hear that which thou would'st
know,

And with thy knowledge let the dread curse go,
Which us hath cursed most of all those who dwell
Upon this wretched fire-concealing shell.
Slave of the cruel gods! go, get ye hence,
And storing deeds for fruitless penitence,
Go east, as though in Scythia were thine home,
But when unto the wind-beat seas ye come
Stop short, and turn round to the south again
Until ye reach the western land of Spain:
Then o'er the straits ye soon shall come to be
Betwixt the ocean and the inner sea,
Thenceforth go westward even as thou mayst
Until ye find a dark land long laid waste,
Where green cliffs rise from out an inky sea,
But no green leaf may grow on bush or tree.
No sun makes day there, no moon lighteth night,
The long years there must pass in grey twilight;
There dwell our sisters, walking dismally,
Between the dull-brown caverns and the sea.

"Tool in the hand of god! do there thy might!
Nor fall like us, nor strive for peace and right;
But give our own unto us and be gone,
And leave us to our misery all alone."

Then straight he put the eye into the hand
Of her that spoke, and turned from that white land,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Leaving them singing their grim song again.
But flying forth he came at last to Spain,
And so unto the southern end of it,
And then with restless wings due west did flit
For many a day across the sea he flew,
That lay beneath him clear enough and blue,
Until at last rose such a thick grey mist,
That of what lay beneath him nought he wist ;
But still through this he flew a night and day
Harkening the washing of the watery way,
Unseen : but when, at ending of the night,
The mist was gone and grey sea came in sight,
He thought that he had reached another world ;
This way and that the leaden seas were hurled,
Moved by no wind, but by some unseen power ;
Twilight it was and still his feet dropped lower,
As through the thickening, dim hot air he passed,
Until he feared to reach the sea at last.

But even as his feet dragged in the sea,
He, praying to the goddess fervently,
Felt her good help, for soon he rose again
Three fathoms up, and flew with lessened pain ;
And looking through the dimness could behold
The wretched land whereof the sisters told,
And soon could see how down the green cliffs fell
A yellow stream, that from some inland well
Arose, and through the land ran sluggishly,
Until it poured with dull splash in the sea
Like molten lead ; and nigher as he came
He saw great birds, whose kind he could not name,
That whirling noiselessly about did seem

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

To seek a prey within that leaden stream ;
And drawing nigher yet, at last he saw
That many of them held, with beak or claw,
Great snakes they tore still flying through the air.
Then making for the cliff and lighting there
He saw, indeed, that tawny stream and dull
Of intertwining writhen snakes was full,
So, with a shudder, thence he turned away,
And through the untrodden land he took his way.

Now cave-pierced rocks there rose up everywhere,
And gaunt old trees, of leaves and fruit all bare ;
And midst this wretchedness a mighty hall,
Whose great stones made a black and shining wall ;
The doors were open, and thence came a cry
Of one in anguish wailing bitterly ;
Then o'er its threshold passed the son of Jove,
Well shielded by the grey-eyed Maiden's love.

Now there he saw two women bent and old,
Like to those three that north he did behold,
There were they sitting well-nigh motionless,
Their eyes grown stony with their long distress,
Staring at nought, and still no sound they made,
And on their knees their wrinkled hands were laid.

But a third woman paced about the hall,
And ever turned her head from wall to wall
And moaned aloud, and shrieked in her despair ;
Because the golden tresses of her hair
Were moved by writhing snakes from side to side,
That in their writhing oftentimes would glide
On to her breast, or shuddering shoulders white ;
Or, falling down, the hideous things would light :

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Upon her feet, and crawling thence would twine
Their slimy folds about her ankles fine.
But in a thin red garment was she clad,
And round her waist a jewelled band she had,¹
The gift of Neptune on the fatal day
When fate her happiness first put away.

So there awhile unseen did Perseus stand,
With softening heart, and doubtful trembling hand
Laid on his sword-hilt, muttering, "Would that she
Had never turned her woeful face to me."
But therewith Pallas smote him with this thought,
"Does she desire to live, who has been brought
Into such utter woe and misery,
Wherefrom no god or man can set her free,
Since Pallas' dreadful vow shall bind her fast,
Till earth and heaven are gone, and all is past?
—And yet, would God the thing were at an end."

Then with that word, he saw her stop and rend
The raiment from her tender breast and soft,
And with a great cry lift her arms aloft;
Then on her breast her head sank, as she said,
"O ye, be merciful, and strike me dead!
How many an one cries unto you to live,
Which gift ye find no little thing to give,
O give it now to such, and unto me
That other gift from which all people flee!

"O was it not enough to take away.
The flowery meadows and the light of day?
Or not enough to take away from me
The once-loved faces that I used to see;
To take away sweet sounds and melodies,

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

The song of birds, the rustle of the trees ;
To make the prattle of the children cease,
And wrap my soul in shadowy hollow peace,
Devoid of longing ? Ah, no, not for me !
For those who die your friends this rest shall be ;
For me no rest from shame and sore distress,
For me no moment of forgetfulness ;
For me a soul that still might love and hate,
Shut in this fearful land and desolate,
Changed by mine eyes to horror and to stone ;
For me perpetual anguish all alone,
Midst many a tormenting misery,
Because I know not if I e'er shall die.

“ And yet, and yet, thee will I pray unto,
Thou dweller in the shifting halls of blue,
Fathoms beneath the treacherous bridge of lands.
Call now to mind that day upon the sands,
Hard by the house of Pallas white and cold,
Where hidden in some wave thou didst behold
This body, fearless of the cold grey sea,
And dowered as yet with fresh virginity.

“ How many things thou promisedst me then !
Who among all the daughters of great men
Should be like me ? what sweet and happy life !
What peace, if all the world should be at strife,
Thou promisedst me then ! Lay all aside,
And give unto the great Earth-Shaker's bride
That which the wretch shut up in prison drear,
Deprived of all, yet ceases not to fear ;
That which all men fear more than all distress,
The rest of death, and dull forgetfulness.”

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Her constant woeful prayer was heard at last,
For now behind her unseen Perseus passed,
And silently whirled the great sword around ;
And when it fell, she fell upon the ground,
And felt no more of all her bitter pain.

But from their seats rose up with curses vain
The two immortals when they saw her fall
Headless upon the floor, and loud 'gan call
On those that came not, because far away
Their friends and kindred were upon that day.
Then to and fro about the hall they ran
To find the slayer, were he god or man,
And when unseen from out the place he drew,
Upon the unhappy corpse, with wails, they threw
Their wretched and immortal bodies old :
But when the one the other did behold,
Alive and hideous there before her eyes,
Such anguish for the past time would arise
Within their hearts, that the lone hall would ring
With dreadful shrieks of many an impious thing.

Yet of their woe but little Perseus knew,
As with a stout heart south-east still he flew.

NOW at his side a wallet Perseus bore,
With threads of yellow gold embroidered o'er,
Shuddering, therein he laid the fearful head,
Lest he unwitting, yet might join the dead,
Or those he loved, by sight of it be slain.

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

But strong fate led him to the Lybian plain,
Where, at the ending of a sultry day,
A palace huge and fair beneath him lay,
Whose roofs with silver plates were covered o'er;
Then lighting down by its enormous door,
He heard unmeasured sounds of revelry,
And thought, "A fair place this will be for me,
Who lack both food and drink, and rest this night."
So turning to the ruddy flood of light,
Up the huge steps he toiled unto the hall;
But even as his eager foot did fall
Upon the threshold, such a mocking shout
Rang in his ears as Etna sendeth out
When, at the day's end, round the stithy cold
The Cyclops some unmeasured banquet hold.
And monstrous men could he see sitting there,
Burnt by the sun, with length of straight back hair,
And taller far than men are wont to be;
And at a gold-strewn dais could he see
A mighty King, a fearful man to face,
Brown-skinned and black-haired, of the giants' race,
Who seeing him, with thundering voice 'gan call,
"O Stranger, come forthwith into the hall,
Atlas would see thee!" Forth stood Perseus then,
And going 'twixt the rows of uncounted men
Seemed but a pigmy; but his heart was great,
And vain is might against the stroke of fate.
Then the King cried, "Who art thou, little one?
Surely in thy land weak must be the sun
If there are bred such tender folk as thou:
May the gods grant such men are few now in

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Art thou a king's son?" Loud he laughed withal,
And shouts of laughter rang throughout the hall,
Like clattering thunder on a July night.
But Perseus quailed not. "Little were my might,"
He said, "if helpless on the earth I were;
But to the equal gods my life is dear,
And certes victory over Jove's own son
By earthly men shall not be lightly won."

So spake he, moving inward from the door,
But louder laughed the black King than before,
And all his people shouted at his beck;
Therewith he cried, "Break now this Prince's neck,
And take him forth and hang him up straightway
Before my door, that henceforth from this day
Pigmies and jesters may take better heed,
Lest at our hands they gain a liar's meed."

Then started up two huge men from the board,
And Perseus, seeing them come, half drew his sword,
Looking this way and that; but in a while,
Upon his wallet with a deadly smile
He set his hand, and forth the head he drew,
Dead, white midst golden hair, where serpents blue
Yet dangled dead; and ere they stooped to take
His outstretched arms, before them he did shake
The dreadful thing: then stopped they suddenly,
Stone dead, without a wound or any cry.

Then toward the King he held aloft the head,
And as he stiffened cried at him, and said,
"O King! when such a gift I bring to thee,
Wilt thou be dumb and neither hear nor see?
Listen how sing thy men, and in thy hall

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

How swift the merry dancers' feet do fall !”

For now these, thinking him some god to be,
Cried in their fear, and made great haste to flee,
Crowding about the great doors of the hall,
Until not one was left of great or small,
But the dead king, and those that there had died.—
—Lo, in such way Medusa's head was tried !

But when the living giant-folk were gone,
And with the dead men there he stood alone,
He turned him to the food that thereby lay,
And ate and drank with none to say him nay ;
And on the floor at last he laid him down,
Midst heaps of unknown tawny skins and brown.

There all the night in dreamless sleep he lay,
But rose again at the first streak of day,
And looking round about rejoiced to see
The uncouth image of his enemy,
Silent for ever, with wide mouth agape
E'en as he died ; and thought, “ Who now shall 'scape
When I am angry, while this gift I have ?
How well my needy lovers I may save
While this dread thing still hangeth by my side !”

Then out he passed : a plain burnt up, and wide,
He saw before him, bare of any trees,
And much he longed for the green dashing seas,
And merry winds of the sweet island shore,
Fain of the gull's cry, for the lion's roar.

Yet, glad at heart, he lifted up his feet
From the parched earth, and soon the air did beat,
Going north-east, and flew forth all the day,
And when the night fell still was on the way ;

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And many a sandy plain did he pass o'er,
And many a dry much-trodden river shore,
Where thick the thirsty beasts stood in the night.
The stealthy leopard saw him with affright,
As whining from the thicket it crept out ;
The lion drew back at his sudden shout
From off the carcass of some slaughtered beast ;
And the thin jackals waiting for the feast
Stinted their hungry howls as he passed by ;
And black men sleeping, as he came anigh
Dreamed ugly dreams, and reached their hands to
 seize
The spear or sword that lay across their knees.

So at the last the sea before him lay,
But not for that did he make any stay,
But flew on till the night began to wane,
And the grey sea was blue and green again ;
Until the sunlight on his wings shone fair,
And turned to red the gold locks of his hair.
Then in a little while he saw no land,
But all was heaving sea on every hand,
Driven this way and that way by the wind.
Still fast he flew, thinking some coast to find,
And so, about the middle of the day,
Far to the east a land before him lay,
And when unto it he was come anigh
He saw the sea beat on black cliffs and high,
With green grass growing on the tops of them,
Binding them round as gold a garment's hem.
Then slowly alongside thereof he flew

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

If haply by some sign the land he knew,
Until a ness he reached, whereon there stood
A tower new-built of mighty beams of wood ;
So nigh he came that, unseen, he could see
Pale haggard faces peering anxiously
From out its well-barred windows that looked forth
Into a bay that lay upon the north ;
But inland over moveless waves of down
Shone the white walls of some great royal town.
Now underneath the scarped cliffs of the bay
From horn to horn a belt of sand there lay
Fast lessening as the flood-tide swallowed it,
There all about did the sea-swallows flit,
And from the black rocks yellow hawks flew down,
And cormorants fished amidst the sea-weed brown,
Or on the low rocks nigh unto the sea,
While over all the fresh wind merrily ♣
Blew from the sea, and o'er the pale blue sky
Thin clouds were stretched the way the wind went by,
And forward did the mighty waters press
As though they loved the green earth's stedfastness.
Nought slept, but everything was bright and fair
Beneath the bright sun and the noon-day air.

Now hovering there, he seemed to hear a sound
Unlike the sea-bird's cry, and, looking round,
He saw a figure standing motionless
Beneath the cliff, midway 'twixt ness and ness,
And as the wind lull'd heard that cry again,
That sounded like the wail of one in pain ;
Wondering thereat, and seeking marvels new
He lighted down, and toward the place he drew,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And made invisible by Pallas' aid,
He came within the scarped cliff's purple shade,
And found a woman standing lonely there,
Naked, except for tresses of her hair
That o'er her white limbs by the breeze were wound,
And brazen chains her weary arms that bound
Unto the sea-beat overhanging rock,
As though her golden-crowned head to mock.
But nigh her feet upon the sand there lay
Rich raiment that had covered her that day,
Worthy to be the ransom of a king,
Unworthy round such loveliness to cling.

Alas, alas! no bridal play this was,
The tremors that throughout her limbs did pass,
Her restless eyes, the catching of her breath,
Were but the work of the cold hand of death,
She waited for, midst untold miseries,
As, now with head cast back, and close-shut eyes,
She wailed aloud, and now all spent with woe
Stared out across the rising sea, as though
She deemed each minute brought the end anigh
For which in her despair she needs must cry.

Then unseen Perseus stole anigh the maid,
And love upon his heart a soft hand laid,
And tender pity rent it for her pain,
Nor yet an eager cry could he refrain,
As now, transformed by that piteous sight,
Grown like unto a god for pride and might,
Down on the sand the mystic cap he cast

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

And stood before her with flushed face at last,
And grey eyes glittering with his great desire
Beneath his hair, that like a harmless fire
Blown by the wind shone in her hopeless eyes.

But she, all rigid with her first surprise,
Ceasing her wailing as she heard his cry,
Stared at him, dumb with fear and misery,
Shrunk closer yet unto the rocky place
And writhed her bound hands as to hide her face;
But sudden love his heart did so constrain,
With open mouth he strove to speak in vain
And from his heart the hot tears 'gan to rise;
But she midst fear beheld his kind grey eyes,
And then, as hope came glimmering through her dread,
In a weak voice he scarce could hear, she said,
"O Death! if thou hast risen from the sea,
Sent by the gods to end this misery,
I thank them that thou comest in this form,
Who rather thought to see a hideous worm .
Come trailing up the sands from out the deep,
Or suddenly swing over from the steep
To lap me in his folds, and bone by bone
Crush all my body: come then, with no moan,
Will I make ready now to leave the light.

"But yet—thy face is wonderful and bright;
Art thou a god? Ah, then be kind to me!
Is there no valley far off from the sea
Where I may live alone, afar from strife
Nor anger any god with my poor life?
Or do the gods delight in misery
And art thou come to mock me ere I die?

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Alas, must they be pitiless, when they
Fear not the hopeless slayer of the day!
Speak, speak! what meanest thou by that sad smile?

“Oh, if the gods could be but men awhile
And learn such fearful things unspeakable
As I have learned this morn, what man can tell
What golden age might wrap the world again?
Ah, dost thou love me, is my speech not vain?
Did not my beauty perish on this morn?
Dost thou not kiss me now for very scorn?
Alas, my shame, I cannot flee from thee!
Alas, my sin! no green-stemmed laurel tree
Shall mock thy grasp, no misty mountain stream
Shall wake thee shuddering from a lovely dream,
No helping god shall hear, but thou alone!—
Help me, I faint! I see not! art thou gone?
Alas! thy lips were warm upon my brow,
What good deed will it be to leave me now!

“Oh, yet I feel thy kind and tender hand
On my chained wrist, and thou wilt find some land
Where I may live a little, free from fear.

“And yet, and yet, if thou hast sought me here
Being but a man, no manly thing it is,
Nor hope thou from henceforth to live in bliss,
If here thou wrongest me, who am but dead.”

Then as she might she hung adown her head,
Her bosom heaved with sobs, and from her eyes
Long dried amidst those hopeless miseries
Unchecked the salt tears o'er her bosom ran
As love and shame their varying strife began.

But overwhelmed with pity, mad with love,

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

Stammering, nigh weeping spoke the son of Jove,—

“Alas, what land is this, where such as thou

Are thus tormented? look upon me now,

And cease thy fear! no evil man am I,

No cruel god to mock thy misery;

But the gods help me, and their unmoved will

Has sent me here to save thee from some ill,

I know not what; to give thee rest from this,

And unto me unutterable bliss,

If from a man thou takest not away

The gift thou gavest to a god to-day;

But I may be a very god to thee,

Because the gods are helpful unto me,

Nor would I fear them aught if thou wert nigh,

Since unto each it happeneth once to die.

“Speak not, sweet maid, till I have loosed thine hands
From out the grasp of these unworthy bands.”

So straight, and ere her lips could frame a word,

From out its sheath he drew the gleaming sword,

And while she shut her dazzled eyes for fear

To see the glittering marvel draw anear,

Unto her side her weary arms fell freed;

Then must she shrink away, for now indeed

With rest and hope and growing love there came

Remembrance of her helplessness and shame.

Weeping she said, “My fate is but to die,

Forget the wild words of my misery,

Take a poor maiden’s thanks, and leave this place,

Nor for thy pity die before my face,

As verily thou wilt if thou stay’st here;

Because, however free thou art from fear,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

What hopest thou against this beast to do,
My death, and thine unconquerable foe?
When all a kingdom's strength has had no hope
With this strange horror, God-endowed, to cope,
But deemed it good to give up one poor maid
Unto his wrath, who makes the world afraid."

"Nay," said he, "but thy fate shall be my fate,
And on these sands thy bane will I await,
Though I know nought of all his mightiness;
For scarcely yet a man, I none the less
Such things have done as make me now a name,
Nor can I live a loveless life of shame,
Or leave thee now, this day's most god-like gift,
Into some unknown mortal pain to drift."

She, hurrying as he spoke, with trembling hands
Had lifted up her raiment from the sands,
And yet therewith she was not well arrayed,
Before she turned round, ghastly white, and said,
"Look seaward and behold my death draw nigh,
Not thine—not thine—but kiss me ere I die;
Alas! how many things I had to tell,
For certainly I should have loved thee well."

He came to her and kissed her as she sank
Into his arms, and from the horror shrank,
Clinging to him, scarce knowing he was there;
But through the drifting wonder of her hair,
Amidst his pity, he beheld the sea,
And saw a huge wave rising mightily
Above the smaller breakers of the shore,
Which in its green breast for a minute bore

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

A nameless horror, that it cast aland,
And left, a huge mass on the oozing sand,
That scarcely seemed a living thing to be,
Until at last those twain it seemed to see,
And gathering up its strange limbs, towards them
passed.

And therewithal a dismal trumpet-blast
Rang from the tower, and from the distant town
The wind in answer brought loud wails adown.

Then Perseus gently put the maid from him,
Who sank down shivering in her every limb,
Silent despite herself for fear and woe,
As down the beach he ran to meet the foe.

But he, beholding Jove's son drawing near,
A great black fold against him did uprear,
Maned with grey tufts of hair, as some old tree
Hung round with moss, in lands where vapours be ;
From his bare skull his red eyes glowed like flame,
And from his open mouth a sound there came,
Strident and hideous, that still louder grew
As that rare sight of one in arms he knew :
But godlike, fearless, burning with desire,
The adamant jaws and lidless eyes of fire
Did Perseus mock, and lightly leapt aside
As forward did the torture-chamber glide
Of his huge head, and ere the beast could turn,
One moment bright did blue-edged Herpe burn,
The next was quenched in the black flow of blood ;
Then in confused folds the hero stood,
His bright face shadowed by the jaws of death,
His hair blown backward by the poisonous breath ;

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

But all that passed, like lightning-lighted street
In the dark night, as the blue blade did meet
The wrinkled neck, and with no faltering stroke,
Like a god's hand the fell enchantment broke,
And then again in place of crash and roar,
He heard the shallow breakers on the shore,
And o'er his head the sea-gull's plaintive cry,
Careless as gods for who might live or die.

Then Perseus from the slimy loathsome coil
Drew out his feet, and then with little toil
Smote off the head, the terror of the lands,
And, dragging it along, went up the sands,
Shouting aloud for joy, "Arise, arise,
O thou whose name I know not! Ope thine eyes
To see the gift, that I, first seen to-day,
Am hastening now before thy feet to lay!
Look up, look up! What shall thy sweet face be,
That I have seen amidst such misery,
When thou at last beginnest to rejoice."

Slowly she rose, her burdened heart found voice
In sobs and murmurs inarticulate,
And clean forgetting all the sport of fate,
She scarce could think that she should ever die,
As locked in fearless, loving, straight embrace,
They made a heaven of that lone sandy place.

Then on a rock smoothed by the washing sea
They sat, and eyed each other lovingly.
And few words at the first the maiden said,
So wrapped she was in all the goodlihead
Of her new life made doubly happy now:

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

For her alone the sea-breeze seemed to blow,
For her in music did the white surf fall,
For her alone the wheeling birds did call
Over the shallows, and the sky for her
Was set with white clouds, far away and clear ;
E'en as her love, this strong and lovely one
Who held her hand, was but for her alone.

But after loving silence for a while,
She, turning round to him her heavenly smile,
Said, "Tell me, O my love, what name is thine,
What mother brought thee forth so nigh divine,
Whence art thou come to take away my shame?"

Then said he, "Fair love, Perseus is my name,
Not known of men, though that may come to be ;
And her that bore me men call Danaë,
And tales of my begetting people tell
And call my father, Jove : but it befell
Unto my mother, when I first was born,
That she, cast out upon the sea, forlorn
Of help of men, unto Seriphos came ;
And there she dwells as now, not gathering shame,
But called a Queen ; and thence I come indeed,
Sent by the gods to help thee in thy need."

Then he began and told her everything
Down to the slaying of the monstrous king,
She listening to him meanwhile, glad at heart
That he had played so fair and great a part.
But all being told, she said, "This salt pool nigh
Left by the tide, now mirrors well the sky,
So smooth it is, and now I stand anear
Canst thou not see my foolish visage clear,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Yea, e'en the little gems upon my hands?
May I not see this marvel of the lands
So mirrored, and yet live—make no delay,
The sea is pouring fast into the bay,
And we must soon be gone."

"Look down," he said,
"And take good heed thou turnest not thine head."
Then gazing down, with shuddering dread and awe,
Over her imaged shoulder, soon she saw
The head rise up, so beautiful and dread,
That, white and ghastly, yet seemed scarcely dead
Beside the image of her own fair face,
As, daring not to move from off the place,
But trembling sore, she cried, "Enough, O love!
What man shall doubt thou art the son of Jove;
I think thou wilt not die:" then with her hand
She hid her eyes, and trembling did she stand
Until she felt his lips upon her cheek;
Then turning round, with anxious eyes and meek,
She gazed upon him, and some doubtful thought
Up to her brow the tender colour brought,
And sinking somewhat down her golden head,
Stammering a little now these words she said,—

"O godlike man, thou dost not ask my name,
Or why folk gave me up to death and shame;
Dost thou not dread I am some sorceress,
Whose evil deeds well earned me that distress?"

"Tell me thy name," he said; "yet as for thee
I deem that thou wert bound beside the sea,
Because the gods would have the dearest thing
Which thy land held for its own ransoming."

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

She said, "O love, the sea is rising fast,
And time it is that we henceforth were past;
The only path that leadeth to the down
Is far, and thence a good way is the town;
Wend we, and on our journey will I tell
How all these things, now come to nought, befell."

"Lead me," he said, and lifted from the sand
The monster's head; and therewith, hand in hand,
Together underneath the cliffs they went,
The while she told her tale to this intent.

"This is the Syrian land, this town anigh
Is Joppa, and Andromeda am I,
Daughter of him who holds the sceptre there,
King Cepheus and Cassiope the fair.

"She, smit by cruel madness, brought ill fate
Upon the land to make it desolate;
For by the place whence thou deliveredst me,
An altar to the daughters of the sea
Erewhile there stood, and we in solemn wise,
Unto the maids were wont to sacrifice,
And give them gifts of honey, oil, and wine,
That we might have the love of folk divine;
And so it chanced that on a certain day,
When from that place the sea was ebb'd away,
Upon the firm sands I and many a maid
About that altar went, while the flutes played
Such notes as sea-folk love; and as we went
Upon the wind rich incense-clouds we sent
About the hallowed stone, whereon there lay
Fruits of the earth for them to bear away;

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Thus did we maids, as we were wont to do,
And watching us, as was their wont also,
Our mothers stood, my own amidst the rest.

"But ere the rites were done, as one possessed
She cried aloud, 'Alas, what do we now,
Such honour unto unseen folk to show !
To spend our goods, our labour, and our lives,
In serving these the careless sea-wind drives
Hither and thither through the booming seas,
While thou Andromeda art queen of these,
And in thy limbs such lovely godhead moves,
That thou shalt be new Mother of the Loves ;
Thou shalt not die ! Go, child, and sit alone,
And take our homage on thy golden throne ;
And I that bore thee will but be thy slave,
Nor shall another any worship have.'

"Trembling awhile we stood with heads downcast,
To hear those words, then from the beach we passed ;
And sick at heart each went unto her home
Expecting when the fearful death should come,
Like those of Thebes, who, smit by arrows, fell
Before the feet of her who loved too well.

"And yet stayed not my mother's madness there ;
She caused men make a silver image fair
Of me unhappy, round the base she writ
'*Fairest of all*,' and bade men carry it,
With flowers and music, down unto the sea,
Who on the altar fixed it solidly
Against the beating of the winds and waves.

"But we, expecting now no quiet graves,
Trembled at every murmur of the night,

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

And if a cloud should hide the noon sun bright
Grew faint with terror ; yet the days went by
Harmless above our great iniquity,
Until one wretched morn I woke to hear,
Down in the street loud wails and cries of fear,
And my heart died within me, nor durst I
Ask for the reason of that bitter cry,
Though soon I knew it—nigh unto the sea
Were gathered folk for some festivity ;
When, at the happiest moment of their feast,
Forth from the deep there came a fearful beast
No man could name, who quickly snatched away
Their fairest maid, and with small pain did slay
Such men as there in arms before him stood ;
For unto him was steel as rotten wood,
And darts as straw—nor grew the story old,
Day after day e'en such a tale was told.
—Kiss me, my love ! I grow afraid again ;
Kiss me amid the memory of my pain.
Draw me to thee, that I thine arms may feel,
A better help than triple brass or steel !
“ Alas, love ! folk began to look on me
With angry eyes, and mutter gloomily,
As pale and trembling through the streets I passed ;
And from the heavy thunder-cloud, at last
The dreadful lightning quivered through the air :
For on a day the people filled the square
With arms and tumult, and my name I heard,
But heard no more ; for, shuddering and afraid,
Unto my far-off quiet bower I fled,
And from that moment deemed myself but dead.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

How the time passed I know not, what they did
I know not now ; for like a quail half hid,
When the hawk's pinions shade the sun from him,
Crouching adown, I felt my life wax dim.

"The gods have made us mighty certainly
That we can bear such things and yet not die.
This morn—Ah, love, and was it yet this year,
Wherein thou camest to me, kind and dear ?—
This morn they brought me forth, they did on me
This mocking raiment bright with bravery ;
They mocked my head with gold, with gems my feet,
My heart with lovely songs and music sweet.
Thou wouldst have wept to see me led along
Amidst that dreary pomp with flowers and song,
But if folk wept, how could I note it then ;
Most vain to me were grown all ways of men.

"They brought me to mine image on the sands,
They took it down, they bore it in their hands
To deck mine empty tomb, I think, and then—
O cruel is the fearfulness of men,
Striving a little while to 'scape death's pain !—
My naked body they spared not to chain,
Lest I should 'scape the death from which they fled,
Then left me there alone and shamed—and dead—
While to his home each went again, to live
Such vain forgetful life as fate might give.

"O love, to think that love can pass away,
That, soon or late, to us shall come a day
When this shall be forgotten ! e'en this kiss
That makes us now forget the high God's bliss,
And sons of men with all their miseries."

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

"Turn round," he said, "and let thy well-loved eyes
Behold the sea from this high grassy hill,
And thou shalt see the risen waves now fill
The bay from horn to horn of it: no more
Thy footprints bless the shell-strewn sandy shore,
The vale the monster scooped as 'neath my sword
He writhed, the black stream that from out him
poured,

The rock we sat on, and the pool wherein
Thou sawest the gods' revenge for heedless sin—
How the green ripples of the shallow sea
Cover the strife and passion peacefully,
Nor lack the hallowing of the low broad sun.

"So has love stolen upon us, lovely one,
And quenched our old lives in this new delight,
And if thou needs must think of that dull night
That creepeth on no otherwise than this,
Yet for that thought hold closer to thy bliss,
Come nigher, come! forget the more thy pain."

So there of all love's feasting were they fain,
Words fail to tell the joyance that they had,
And with what words they made each other glad.

SO, as it drew to ending of the day,
Unto the city did they take their way,
And when they stood before its walls at last
They found the heavy gate thereof shut fast,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And no one on the walls for very shame ;
Then to the wicket straightway Perseus came,
And down the monster's grinning head he threw,
While on the horn a mighty blast he blew,
But no one answered ; then he cried aloud,
" Come forth, O warders, and no more shrink cowed
Behind your battlements ! one man alone
Has dared to do what thousands have not done,
And the great beast beside the sea lies dead :
Come forth, come forth ! and gaze upon this head ! "

Then opened was the door a little way,
And one peered forth and saw him with the may,
And turning round some joyous words he cried
Unto the rest, who oped the great gates wide,
And through them Perseus the saved maiden led.
Then as the folk cast eyes upon the head,
They stopped their shouts to gaze thereon with fear,
And timidly the women drew anear ;
But soon, beholding Perseus' godlike grace,
His mighty limbs, and flushed and happy face,
Cried out unto the maid, " O happy thou,
Who art well paid for every trouble now,
In winning such a godlike man as this."
And many there were fain his skirts to kiss ;
But he smiled down on them, and said, " Rejoice,
O girls, indeed, but yet lift heart and voice
Unto the gods to-day, and not to me !
For they it was who sent me to this sea.
And first of all fail not to bless the Maid
Through whom it came that I was not afraid."

So through the streets they went, and quickly spread

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

News that the terror of the land was dead.
And folk thronged round to see the twain go by,
Or went before with flowers and minstrelsy,
Rejoicing for the slaying of their shame.

Thus harbinger'd the happy lovers came
Unto King Cepheus' royal house of gold,
To whom by this the joyful cries had told
That all was changed and still his days were good,
So, eager in his well-built porch he stood,
No longer now in mournful raiment clad.

But when they met, then were those two more glad
Than words can say; there came her mother, too,
And round about her neck fair arms she threw,
Weeping for joy; and all about the King
The great men stood and eyed the fearful thing
That lay at Perseus' feet: then the King said,
"O thou, who on this day hast saved my maid,
Wilt thou rule half my kingdom from to-day?
Or wilt thou carry half my wealth away?
Or in some temple shall we honour thee,
Setting thine image up beside the sea?
Ask what thou wilt before these mighty lords,
And straightway is it thine without more words."

Then in his heart laughed Perseus: and, "O
King,"

He said, "I ask indeed a mighty thing;
Yet neither will I take thy wealth away,
Or make thee less a king than on this day,
And in no temple shall mine image stand
To look upon the sea that beats the land,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

For fear the God who now is friend to me
Thereby should come to be mine enemy ;
And yet on this day am I grown so bold,
I ask a greater gift than power or gold ;
Give me thy maiden saved, to be my bride,
And let me go, because the world is wide,
And the gods hate me not, and I am fain
Some fertile land with these my hands to gain.
Nor think thereby that thou wilt get thee shame,
For if thou askest of my race and name,
Perseus I am, the son of Danaë,
Born nigh to Argos, by the sounding sea,
And those that know, call me the son of Jove,
Who in past days my mother's face did love."

Then, glad at heart, the King said, " Poor indeed
Were such a gift, to give thee to thy meed
This that thine own unconquered hands have won.
O ye ! bring now the head and cast thereon
Jewels and gold from out my treasury,
Till nothing of its grimness men can see ;
And let folk bring round to the harbour mouth
My ship that saileth yearly to the south ;
That to his own land since it is his will
This Prince may go ; nor yet without his fill
Of that which all men long for everywhere,
Honour, and gold, and women kind and fair.
And ye, O lords, to-morrow ere midday,
Come hither to my house in great array,
For then this marriage will we solemnise,
Appeasing all the gods with gifts of price."
Then loud all shouted, and the end of day

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

Being come, Andromeda was led away
Unto her bower, and there within a while
She fell asleep, and in her sleep did smile,
For on the calm of that forgetfulness
Her bliss but happy longings did impress.

But in the Syrian King's adorned hall
Sat Perseus till the shadows 'gan to fall
Shorter beneath the moon, and still he thought
Amid the feast of what a day had brought
Unto his heart, a foolish void before,
And for the morrow must he long so sore
That all those joyances and minstrelsy
Seemed unto him but empty things to be.

Early next morn the city was astir,
And country folk came in from far and near
Hearing the joyous tidings that the beast
Was dead, and fain to see the marriage feast,
And joyous folk wandered from street to street
Crowned with fair flowers and singing carols sweet.

Then to the maiden's chamber maidens came,
And woke her up to love and joyous shame,
And as the merry sun streamed through the room
Spread out unequalled marvels of the loom,
Stored up for such an end in days long done,
Ere yet her grey eyes looked upon the sun,
Fine webs like woven mist, wrought in the dawn,
Long ere the dew had left the sunniest lawn,
Gold cloth so wrought that nought of gold seemed
there,
But rather sunlight over blossoms fair ;

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

You would have said that gods had made them,
bright,

To hide her body from the common light
Lest men should die from unfulfilled desire.

Gems too they showed wrought by the hidden fire
That eats the world, and from the unquiet sea
Pearls worth the ransom of an argosy.

Yet all too little all these riches seemed
In worship of her, who as one who dreamed,
By her fair maidens' hands was there arrayed,
Then, with loose hair, ungirded as a maid
Unto the threshold of the house was brought.
But when her hand familiar fingers caught,
And when that voice, that erst amidst her fear
She deemed a god's, now smote upon her ear
Like one new-born to heaven she seemed to be.

But dreamlike was the long solemnity,
Unreal the joyous streets, where yesterday
She passed half dead upon her wretched way;
And though before the flickering altar flame
She trembled when she thought of that past shame,
And midst the shouting knit her brows to think
Of what a cup these men had bidden her drink,
Unreal they seemed, forgotten as a tale
We cannot tell, though it may still avail
For pensive thoughts betwixt the day and night.

All things unto the gods were done aright;
Beside the sea the flame and smoke uprose
Over rich gifts of many things to those
A woman's tongue had wounded; golden veils,
And images, and bowls wrought o'er with tales,

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

By all the altars of the gods were laid ;
On this last day of maidenhood the maid
Had stood before the shrines, and there had thrown
Sweet incense on the flame, and through the town
The praises of immortals had been sung,
And sacred flowers about the houses hung ;
And now the last hours of the dreamlike day .
Amid great feasting slowly passed away.

But in that land there was a mighty lord,
To whom erewhile the King had pledged his word
That he should wed Andromeda, and he
Heard through sure friends of this festivity
And raged thereat, and thought that eve to come
Unbidden to the feast and bear her home :
Phineus his name was, great amidst great men.

He setting out, came to the great hall when
The sun was well-nigh down, all armed was he,
And at his back came on tumultuously
His armed men-slaves, and folk that loved him dear.

Beholding him, the King rose up in fear,
And all about the place scared folk uprose
As men surprised at feast by deadly foes ;
But Perseus laughing said, "What feat do ye
This eve in honour of my sweet and me ?
Or are ye but the servants of the King
Returned from doing for him some great thing
In a far land ? then sit here and be glad,
For on this day the King feeds good and bad."

Then inarticulate with rage and grief
Phineus turned on him, snatching at a sheaf

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Of darts that hung against a pillar there,
And hurled one at him, that sung through his hair
And slew a serving varlet by his side ;
Then finding voice, he faced the King and cried,
"What dost thou drinking with this robber here,
Who comes to steal that which I hold so dear
That on my knees I prayed for her to thee ?
Speak, Cepheus ! wilt thou give her yet to me
And have good peace withal, or wilt thou die ?
Ho, friends, and ye that follow, cry my cry !"

Then straight the hall rang with a mighty shout
Of "Phineus," and from sheath and belt leapt out
The gleaming steel, and Cepheus stammering
Took heart to say, "Think well upon this thing ;
What should I do ? the man did save her life,
And her he might have made his slave, as wife
He asks for now ; take gifts and go thy way,
Nor quench in blood the joyance of this day."

Then forth stood Perseus with a frowning face
Before them all, and cried out from his place,
"Get ye behind my back, all friends to me !
And ere the lamps are lighted ye shall see
A stranger thing than ye have ever dreamed ;"
And as he spake in his left hand there gleamed
The gold-wrought satchel ; but amazed and cowed
Did the King's friends behind the hero crowd,
Who, ere from out the bag he drew the head,
Unto that band of fierce new-comers said :
"Will ye have life or death ? if life, then go
And on the grass outside your armour throw,

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

And then returning, drink to my delight
Until the summer sun puts out the night."

But loud they shouted, swaying to and fro,
And mocked at him, and cried aloud to know
If in his hand Jove's thunderbolt he had,
Or Mars' red sword that makes the eagles glad;
But Phineus, raging, cried, "Take him alive,
That we for many an hour the wretch may drive
With thongs and clubs until he longs to die!"

Then all set on him with a mighty cry,
But, with a shout that thrilled high over theirs,
He drew the head out by the snaky hairs
And turned on them the baleful glassy eyes;
Then sank to silence all that storm of cries
And clashing arms; the tossing points that shone
In the last sunbeams, went out one by one
As the sun left them, for each man there died,
E'en as the shepherd on the bare hill-side,
Smitten amid the grinding of the storm;
When, while the hare lies flat in her wet form,
E'en strong men quake for fear in houses strong,
And nigh the ground the lightning runs along.

But upright on their feet the dead men stood,
In brow and cheek still flushed the angry blood;
This smiled, the mouth of that was open wide,
This other drew the great sword from his side,
All were at point to do this thing or that.

But silent in the hall the living sat
As those dead men, till Perseus turned at last
And over all a kingly look he cast,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And said, "O friends, drink yet one cup to me,
And then to-morrow will I try the sea
With this my love ; and, sweet Andromeda,
Forgive me that I needs must play this play ;
Forget it, sweet ! thou wilt not see again
This land of thine, upland, or hill, or plain ;
There where we go shall all be new to thee
Except the love that thou hast won from me."
Then to her frightened face there came a smile,
And in her cheeks within a little while
Sweet colour came again ; but right few words
Upon that night were said of king or lords.

But soon again the lovers were alone,
Of all the sons of men remembering none,
Forgetting every god but him whose bow
About the vexed and flowery earth doth go.

SO on the morn, when risen was the sun
About the capstan did the shipmen run,
Warping the great ship to the harbour mouth
That yearly went for treasures to the south,
And thither from the palace did men bear
Bales of rich cloth, and golden vessels rare,
And gold new coined, and silver bars of weight.
And women-slaves with bodies slim and straight
Stood on the snow-white deck, and strong men-slaves
Brought from some conquered land beyond the waves

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

Bore down rich burdens ; so when all things due
Were laid on ship-board, and to noon it grew,
Thither came Perseus with his new-wed wife,
And she, as losing somewhat of her life
Was pensive now, and silent, and regret
Moved in her that her heart must soon forget
All folk and things where first her life began,
Yea, e'en the mother, whose worn face and wan,
Tearless and haughty, yet looked o'er the sea,
As though the life wherein no good could be
She still would bear in every god's despite—
—Ah, folk forget ; the damsel's heart grew light
E'en while her country's cliffs she yet could see.
Should she remember, when so lovingly
That cheek touched hers, and he was hers alone ?

Love while ye may ; if twain grow into one
'Tis for a little while ; the time goes by,
No hatred 'twixt the pair of friends doth lie,
No troubles break their hearts—and yet, and yet—
How could it be ? we strove not to forget ;
Rather in vain to that old time we clung,
Its hopes and wishes round our hearts we hung,
We played old parts, we used old names—in vain,
We go our ways, and twain once more are twain ;
Let pass—at latest when we come to die
Thus shall the fashion of the world go by.

But these, while still at brightest love's flame
burned,
Were glad indeed, as towards Scirphos turned
Bright shone their gilded prow against the sun.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Meanwhile the folk of Joppa, one by one,
Took Phineus' people and their master dead
All turned to stone as they had seen the head,
And in a lonely place they set them down,
Upon a hill that overlooked the town,
And round about them built a wall, four-square,
And at each corner raised a temple fair,
And therein altars made they unto Jove,
Pallas, and Neptune, and the God of Love ;
And in Jove's temple carved that history,
That those who came there after them might see,
From first to last, how all these things were done,
And how these men last looked upon the sun.

But the two lovers going on their way
Grew happier still, as bright day followed day ;
And, the wind favouring, in a little while
They reached the low shore of the friendly isle ;
And, having beached the well-built keel, took land
Where Danaë's boat first touched the yellow sand.
Then cityward alone did Perseus go
His fatal gift unto the King to show ;
And, passing through the fair fields hastily,
Reached the green precinct, where he thought to see
His mother, he had left alive and well ;
But from inside upon his ears there fell
A noise of shrieks and clashing arms and shouts ;
Thereto he ran beset with many doubts,
Since Polydectes' evil wiles he knew,
And what a fate he erst had doomed him to ;
So, hurrying through, he reached the shrine at last,

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

And there beheld his mother, her arms cast
About Minerva's image, and by her
Good Dictys, who, with shield and glittering spear,
Abode the onslaught of an armed band,
At head of whom did Polydectes stand.

Then to her side sprang Perseus with a cry,
And at that sight and sound she spake on high,
"Com'st thou, long looked for? nothing fear I now,
This kingly traitor soon shall lie alow."

Then the King tottered backward, and awhile
Stood staring at him: but an evil smile
Soon hid his fear, as, turning, he beheld
The glittering weapons that his stout slaves held,
And he cried out, "Yea, art thou back again?
And was my story forged for thee in vain?
Be merry then, but give me place or die!
I am not one to meet thee fearfully.

But thee, O brother, must I then slay thee,
And in our house must one more story be?
Give back! nor for a woman's foolishness,
Bring curses on the name thou shouldest bless.
—Set on at once then! take the three of them!"

Then once more clashed the spears, but on the hem
Of that dread satchel Perseus set his hand,
And put his friend aside, and took his stand
Betwixt his mother and the island men;
And terribly he cried, "Thus take thou then
The gift thou badst me bring to thee! nor ask
Of any man again another task,
Except to throw on thee a little sand
That thou may'st reach in peace the shadowy land."

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

His mocking speech he ended with a shout,
And from the bag the dreadful head drew out,
And shook it in the King's bewildered face ;
Who unto him yet strove to make one pace
With feebly brandished spear and drooping shield,
Then unto stony death his heart did yield,
And without any cry upright he died,
With fallen arms and fixed eyes staring wide.
But of his men the bravest turned and fled,
And on the ground some trembled, well-nigh dead
For very fear, till Perseus cried, " Arise,
Lay down your arms and go ! Henceforth be wise ;
Nor at kings' biddings 'gainst the just gods strive."
But as they slunk away, too glad to live
To need more words, and shivering with their dread,
Once more did Perseus hide the fearful head,
And toward his mother turned ; who, with pale face,
Stood trembling there, remembering that embrace
Within the brazen house ; but now he threw
His arms about her as he used to do
When her own arms his little body bore ;
And smiling, even as he smiled of yore,
He said, " O mother, fear me not at all,
But yet bethink thee of the brazen wall
And golden Jove, nor doubt from him I came ;
And no more now shall I be called thy shame,
But thy defence and glory everywhere.

" But now to lovely Argos let us fare,
Too small a land this is become for thee,
And I may hope a greater sovereignty,

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

Who, by God's help, have done such mighty things,
Which I will tell thee of, while the wind sings
Amongst the shrouds of my rich-laden keel,
While by thy feet a god-given gift shall kneel,
My bride new won; in such-like guise will we
Come back to him who gave us to the sea,
And make our peace and all ill blood forget,
That through long happy years thou may'st live yet."

Then did he take good Dictys by the hand,
And said, "O righteous man, we leave this land,
Nor leave thee giftless for the welcoming
Thou gav'st us erst, nor for this other thing
That thou hast wrought for us this happy tide;
Therefore do thou as King herein abide,
And win Jove's love by helping in such wise
As thou didst us, folk sunk in miseries."

So gave he kingdoms, as he took away,
For strong the God was in him on that day,
And the gods smiled to hear him; yea, and she
Who armed him erst, then dealt so lovingly,
She caused the people's hearts towards him to yearn,
Who, thronging round, began somehow to learn
The story of his deeds, and cried aloud,
"Be thou our King!" Then showed he to the
crowd

Dictys his friend, and said, "I to my kin
Must go, mine heritage and goods to win,
And deal a king with kings; but yet see here
This royal man, my helpful friend and dear;
Loved of the gods, surely he is of worth
For greater things." So saying he went forth,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And midst their reverence, leading by the hand
His happy mother, turned into the strand ;
And still the wondering folk with them must go,
And now such honour unto him would show,
That rather they would make him God than King ;
But while fresh carols round him these did sing
They came unto the low, sea-beaten sand ;
And Danaë took the Syrian by the hand
And kissed her, full of joy that such an one
Should bear brave children to her godlike son :
Then Perseus gave command, and on the shore
Great gifts they laid from out his plenteous store,
To glad King Dictys' eyes withal, and then
Bade farewell to him and his island men ;
And all took ship, and hoisting sail straightway,
Departed o'er the restless plain and grey.

Now fair the wind was for a day and night,
But on the second day as it grew light,
And they were thinking that they soon should be
At Argos, rose a tempest on the sea,
And drave them from their course unto a land
Far north thereof. So on the yellow sand
They hauled their ship, and thereto presently
The good folk of the country drew anigh,
To make their market ; and being asked, they said
That this was Thessaly, that strait paths led
Through rugged mountains to a fertile plain
Penëus watered, rich with many a fane :
That following down the stream they soon should
come

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

Unto a mighty people's glorious home,
A god-loved ancient city, called of men
Larissa, and the time was fitting then
To go thereto, and there should they have rest,
For now each comer was an honoured guest,
Because Teutamias, the Thessalian king,
His father dead with games was honouring.
Then to that city Perseus fain would go,
His might unto the gathered men to show;
Desiring, too, to gather tidings there
Of how the old Acrisius yet might fare,
And if unto his scarce-seen Argive home
He in good peace might venture now to come.
So of the country folk he took fair steeds
And gave them gold, and goods for all their needs,
And with a trusty band with this intent
Through the rough passes of the hills he went,
Bearing his mother, and the Syrian may:
As of a king's men deemed of his array,
When to the fertile peopled fields he came;
But yet he bade that none should tell his name.
So coming to Larissa, all men thought,
That he who with him such great marvels brought
Was some great king, though scanty was his band;
So honour did he get on every hand.
But when the games began, and none could win
A prize in any, if he played therein,
A greater name they gave him, saying, "What worth
In this poor age is left upon the earth
To do such deeds? Surely no man this is,
But some god weary of the heavenly bliss."

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

At last, when all the other games were done,
Men fell to play at casting of the stone ;
And strong men cast it, mighty of their hands,
Bearers of great names in the Grecian lands :
But Perseus stood and watched the play alone,
Nor did he move when every man had thrown.
Then cried Teutamias, "Nameless one ! see now
How mightily these strong-armed heroes throw :
Canst thou prevail in this as in the rest ?"

"O King !" said Perseus, "now I think it best
To try the Fates no more ; I must be gone :
Therefore to-day thou seest me thus alone,
For in the house my white-armed damsels stay
To order matters for our homeward way."

"Nay, stranger," said the King, "but rather take
This golden garland for Teutamias' sake,
And try one cast : look, here I have with me
A well-loved guest, who is most fain to see
Thy godlike strength, yea we will draw anigh
To watch the heavy stone like Jove's bolt fly
Forth from thine hand." Then Perseus smiled and
said,

"Nay then, be wary, and guard well thine head !
For who of mortals knoweth where and when
The bolts of Jove shall smite down foolish men ?"

So said he, and withal the King drew nigh,
And with him an old man, who anxiously
Peered round him as if looking for a foe.
Then Perseus made him ready for the throw,
But even as he stooped the stone to raise,
The old man said, "That I the more may praise

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

This hero's cast, come to the other end
And we shall see the hill of granite send
The earth and stones up as its course is spent."
So then beyond the furthest cast they went
By some three yards, and stood aside; but now
Since it was evening and the sun was low
Its beams were in their eyes, nor could they see
If Perseus moved or not; then restlessly
Looking this way or that, the ancient man,
Gathering his garments up, in haste began
To cross the place, but when a warning shout
Rang in his ears, then wavering and in doubt
He stopped, and scarcely had he time to hear
A second cry of horror and of fear,
Ere crushed, and beaten down upon the ground,
The end of all his weary life he found.

Then women shrieked, and strong men shouted
out,
And Perseus ran to those that drew about
The slain old man, and asked them of his name;
But the King, eyeing him as nigh he came,
Said, "This we know, and thy hid name we
know,
For certainly thou art his fated foe,
His very daughter's strange-begotten son,
The child the sea cast up, the dreaded one.
This was Acrisius, who for fear of thee
Shut up thy mother by the sounding sea;
This was the man, who, for the very dread
Of meeting thee, from lovely Argos fled

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

To be my guest. Nay, let thy sharp sword bide
Within its sheath, the world is fair and wide,
Nor have we aught to do to thee for this;
Go then in peace, and live in woe or bliss
E'en as thou may'st, but stay with us no more,
Because we fear the gods may plague us sore
For this thy deed, though they would have it so."

Then soberly thenceforth did Perseus go
Unto his folk, and straightly told them all
That on that luckless day had chanced to fall;
Wondering thereat, there made they no delay,
But down unto the sea they took their way;
And much did Danaë ponder as they went
How the high gods had wrought out their intent,
And thinking on these things she needs must sigh
For pity of her sweet life passing by.

But when they reached the border of the sea,
Then Perseus said, "Though all unwittingly
I slew this man, and though perchance of right
His throne is mine, yet never will I fight
Against the just gods, and I fear the stain
Of kindred blood, if slaying him I gain
His kingdom and the city of my birth:
Now, therefore, since the gods have made the earth
Most fair in many places, let us go
Where'er the god-sent fated wind shall blow
The ship, that carries one the high gods love.
But first the bright-armed lovely maid of Jove
Here let us worship, on this yellow beach,
That her, my helper erst, we may beseech

THE DOOM OF KING ACRISIUS

To grant us much, and first of all things, this,
A land where we may dwell awhile in bliss."

They heard him gladly, for the most of those
Were young, nor yet by mishaps and by foes
Had learned to think the world a dreary thing;
So round about the altar did they sing
And feasted well, and when the day came round
Once more, they went a-shipboard to the sound
Of trumpets and heart-moving melody,
And gave their rich keel to the restless sea.

Then for four days before the wind they drove,
Until at last in sight a new land hove
Their pilot called the coast of Argolis,
That rich in cattle and in horses is.

But landing there had Perseus' godlike fame
Gone on before him, and the people came
And cried upon him for their king and lord,
The people's saving shield and conquering sword;
So in that land he failed not to abide,
And there with many rites he purified
His fated hands of that unlooked-for guilt:
And there a town within a while he built
Men call Mycenæ. Peaceful grew the land
The while the ivory rod was in his hand,
For robbers fled, and good men still waxed strong,
And in no house was any sound of wrong,
Until the Golden Age seemed there to be,
So steeped the land was in felicity.

Time past, and there his wife and mother died,
And he, no god, must lie down by their side,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

While Alcæus his first son reigned after him,
A conquering king, and fair, and strong of limb.

But long ere this he did not fail to lay
The sacred things that brought him on his way
Within Minerva's temple; there with awe
'Twixt silver bars, all folk these marvels saw,
But not for long, for on the twentieth day
From the fair temple were they snatched away
Though by the armed priests guarded faithfully.
But still the empty wallet there did lie
Wherein had Perseus borne the head with him,
Which still when his great deeds were waxing dim,
Hung in the Maiden's temple near the shrine,
And folk would pour before it oil and wine.

And know besides, that from that very year
Those who are wise say that the Maid doth bear
Amidst her shield that awful snaky head
Whereby so many heedless ones are dead.

APRIL

BEFORE the last words of his tale were done
The purple hills had hidden half the sun,
But when the story's death a silence made
Within the hall, in freshness and in shade
The trembling blossoms of the garden lay.

Few words at first the elder men could say,
For thinking how all stories end with this,
Whatever was the midway gain and bliss :
“He died, and in his place was set his son ;
He died, and in a few days every one
Went on their way as though he had not been.”

Yet with the pictures that their eyes had seen,
As still from point to point that history past,
And round their thoughts its painted veil was cast,
Their hearts were softened,—far away they saw
That other world, that 'neath another law
Had lived and died ; when man might hope to see
Some earthly image of Divinity,
And yet not die, but, strengthened by the sight,
Cast fear away, and go from might to might,
Until to godlike life, though short, he came,
Amidst all losses winning hope of fame,
Nor losing joy the while his life should 'dure,
For that at least his valiant strife made sure,
That still in place of dreamy, youthful hope,
With slow decay and certain death could cope.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

So mused the Wanderers, and awhile might deem
That world might not be quite an empty dream,
But dim foreshadowings of what yet might come
When they perforce must leave that new-gained
home :

Foreshadowings mingled with the images
Of man's misdeeds in greater days than these.

With no harsh words their musing was undone,
The garden birds sang down the setting sun,
A rainy wind from 'twixt the trees arose,
And sang a mournful counterpoint to those ;
And, ere the rain amidst the dark could fall,
The minstrel's song was ringing through the hall.

APRIL

WHEN April-tide was melting into May,
Within a hall that midst the gardens lay
These elders met, and having feasted well,
The time came round the wonted tale to tell.
Then spake a Wanderer: "Sirs, it happed to me,
Long years ago, to cross the narrow sea
That 'twixt us Drontheimers and England lies;
Young was I then, and little thought these eyes
Should see so many lands ere all was done.

"But this land was a fair and fertile one,
As at that time, for April-tide it was,
Even as now; well, sirs, it came to pass
That to this town or that we took our way,
Or in some abbey's guesten-chamber lay,
And many tales we heard, some false, some true,
Of the ill deeds our fathers used to do
Within that land; and still the tale would end,
'Yet did the Saint his Holy House defend;'
Or, 'Sirs, their fury all was nought and vain,
And by our Earl the pirate-king was slain.'
God wot, I laughed full often in my sleeve,
And could have told them stories, by their leave,
With other endings: but I held my tongue.
Let each king's deeds in his own land be sung,
And then will lies stretch far. Besides, those men
Were puffed up with their luck and glory then,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

For at that tide, within the land of France
Unto their piping must all people dance.—
—But let that pass, for Captain Rolf has told
How, on the way, their king he did behold.

“For other tales they told, and one of these
Not all the washing of the troublous seas,
Not all the changeful days whereof ye know,
Have swept from out my memory ; even so
Small things far off will be remembered clear
When matters both more weighty, and more near,
Are waxing dim to us. I, who have seen
So many lands, and midst such marvels been,
Clearer than these abodes of outland men,
Can see above the green and unburnt fen
The little houses of an English town,
Cross-timbered, thatched with fen-reeds coarse and
brown,
And high o’er these, three gables, great and fair,
That slender rods of columns do upbear
Over the minster doors, and imagery
Of kings, and flowers no summer field doth see,
Wrought on those gables.—Yea, I heard withal,
In the fresh morning air, the trowels fall
Upon the stone, a thin noise far away ;
For high up wrought the masons on that day,
Since to the monks that house seemed scarcely well
Till they had set a spire or pinnacle
Each side the great porch. In that burgh I heard
This tale, and late have set down every word
That I remembered, when the thoughts would come

APRIL

Of what we did in our deserted home,
And of the days, long past, when we were young,
Nor knew the cloudy woes that o'er us hung.
And howsoever I am now grown old,
Yet is it still the tale I then heard told
Within the guest-house of that minster-close,
Whose walls, like cliffs new-made, before us rose."

THE PROUD KING

ARGUMENT

A CERTAIN King, blinded by pride, thought that he was something more than man, if not equal to God; but such a judgment fell on him that none knew him for king, and he suffered many things, till in the end, humbling himself, he regained his kingdom and honour.

IN a far country that I cannot name,
And on a year long ages past away,
A King there dwelt, in rest and ease and fame,
And richer than the Emperor is to-day:
The very thought of what this man might say,
From dusk to dawn kept many a lord awake,
For fear of him did many a great man quake.

Young was he when he first sat on the throne,
And he was wedded to a noble wife,
But at the daïs must he sit alone,
Nor durst a man speak to him for his life,
Except with leave: nought knew he change or
 strife,
But that the years passed silently away,
And in his black beard gathered specks of grey.

THE PROUD KING

Now so it chanced, upon a May morning,
Wakeful he lay when yet low was the sun,
Looking distraught at many a royal thing,
And counting up his titles one by one,
And thinking much of things that he had done;
For full of life he felt, and hale and strong,
And knew that none durst say when he did wrong.

For no man now could give him dread or doubt,
The land was 'neath his sceptre far and wide,
And at his beck would well-armed myriads shout.
Then swelled his vain, unthinking heart with pride,
Until at last he raised him up and cried,
"What need have I for temple or for priest?
Am I not God, whiles that I live at least?"

And yet withal that dead his fathers were,
He needs must think, that quick the years pass by;
But he, who seldom yet had seen death near
Or heard his name, said, "Still I may not die
Though underneath the earth my fathers lie;
My sire indeed was called a mighty king,
Yet in regard of mine, a little thing

"His kingdom was; moreover his grandsire
To him was but a prince of narrow lands,
Whose father, though to things he did aspire
Beyond most men, a great knight of his hands,
Yet ruled some little town where now there stands
The kennel of my dogs; then may not I
Rise higher yet, nor like poor wretches die?"

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

"Since up the ladder ever we have gone
Step after step nor fallen back again ;
And there are tales of people who have won
A life enduring, without care or pain,
Or any man to make their wishes vain ;
Perchance this prize unwitting now I hold ;
For times change fast, the world is waxen old."

So mid these thoughts once more he fell asleep,
And when he woke again, high was the sun ;
Then quickly from his gold bed did he leap,
And of his former thoughts remembered none,
But said, "To-day through green woods will we run,
Nor shall to-day be worse than yesterday,
But better it may be, for game and play."

So for the hunt was he apparelled,
And forth he rode with heart right well at ease ;
And many a strong, deep-chested hound they led,
Over the dewy grass betwixt the trees,
And fair white horses fit for the white knees
Of Her the ancients fabled rides a-nights
Betwixt the setting and the rising lights.

Now following up a mighty hart and swift
The King rode long upon that morning tide,
And since his horse was worth a kingdom's gift,
It chanced him all his servants to outride,
Until unto a shaded river-side
He came alone at hottest of the sun,
When all the freshness of the day was done.

THE PROUD KING

Dismounting there, and seeing so far adown
The red-finned fishes o'er the gravel play,
It seemed that moment worth his royal crown
To hide there from the burning of the day,
Wherefore he did off all his rich array,
And tied his horse unto a neighbouring tree,
And in the water sported leisurely.

But when he was fulfilled of this delight
He gat him to the bank well satisfied,
And thought to do on him his raiment bright
And homeward to his royal house to ride;
But 'mazed and angry, looking far and wide
Nought saw he of his horse and rich attire,
And 'gainst the thief 'gan threaten vengeance dire.

But little help his fury was to him,
So lustily he 'gan to shout and cry;
None answered, still the lazy chub did swim
By inches 'gainst the stream; away did fly
The small pied bird, but nathless stayed anigh,
And o'er the stream still plied his fluttering trade,
Of such a helpless man not much afraid.

Weary of crying in that lonely place
He ceased at last, and thinking what to do,
E'en as he was, up stream he set his face,
Since not far off a certain house he knew
Where dwelt his ranger, a lord leal and true,
Who many a bounty at his hands had had,
And now to do him ease would be right glad.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Thither he hastened on, and as he went
The hot sun sorely burned his naked skin,
The whiles he thought, "When he to me has lent
Fine raiment, and at ease I sit within
His coolest chamber clad in linen thin,
And drinking wine, the best that he has got,
I shall forget this troublous day and hot."

Now note, that while he thus was on his way,
And still his people for their master sought,
There met them one who in the King's array
Bestrode his very horse, and as they thought
Was none but he in good time to them brought,
Therefore they hailed him King, and so all rode
From out the forest to his fair abode.

And there in royal guise he sat at meat,
Served, as his wont was, 'neath the canopy,
And there the hounds fawned round about his feet,
And there that city's elders did he see,
And with his lords took counsel what should be;
And there at supper when the day waxed dim
The Queen within his chamber greeted him.

LEAVE we him there; for to the ranger's gate
The other came, and on the horn he blew,
Till peered the wary porter through the grate
To see if he, perchance, the blower knew,
Before he should the wicket gate undo;
But when he saw him standing there, he cried,
"What dost thou, friend, to show us all thine hide!

THE PROUD KING

"We list not buy to-day or flesh or fell ;
Go home and get thyself a shirt at least,
If thou wouldst aught, for saith our vicar well,
That God hath given clothes e'en to the beast."
Therewith he turned to go, but as he ceased
The King cried out, "Open, O foolish man !
I am thy lord and King, Jovinian ;

"Go now, and tell thy master I am here
Desiring food and clothes, and in this plight,
And then hereafter need'st thou have no fear,
Because thou didst not know me at first sight."
"Yea, yea, I am but dreaming in the night,"
The carle said, "and I bid thee, friend, to dream,
Come through ! here is no gate, it doth but seem."

With that his visage vanished from the grate ;
But when the King now found himself alone,
He hurled himself against the mighty gate,
And beat upon it madly with a stone,
Half wondering midst his rage, how any one
Could live, if longed-for things he chanced to lack ;
But midst all this, at last the gate flew back,

And there the porter stood, brown-bill in hand,
And said, "Ah, fool, thou makest this ado,
Wishing before my lord's high seat to stand ;
Thou shalt be gladder soon hereby to go,
Or surely nought of handy blows I know.
Come, willy nilly, thou shalt tell this tale
Unto my lord, if aught it may avail."

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

With that his staff he handled, as if he
Would smite the King, and said, "Get on before!
St. Mary! now thou goest full leisurely,
Who, erewhile, fain wouldst batter down the door.
See now, if ere this matter is passed o'er,
I come to harm, yet thou shalt not escape,
Thy back is broad enow to pay thy jape."

Half blind with rage the King before him passed,
But nought of all he doomed him to durst say,
Lest he from rest nigh won should yet be cast,
So with a swelling heart he took his way,
Thinking right soon his shame to cast away,
And the carle followed still, ill satisfied
With such a wretched losel to abide.

Fair was the ranger's house and new and white,
And by the King built scarce a year ago,
And carved about for this same lord's delight
With woodland stories deftly wrought in stone;
There oft the King was wont to come alone,
For much he loved this lord, who erst had been
A landless squire, a servant of the Queen.

Now long a lord and clad in rich attire,
In his fair hall he sat before the wine
Watching the evening sun's yet burning fire,
Through the close branches of his pleasance shine
In mood of him who deems himself divine,
Remembering not whereto we all must come,
Not thinking aught but of his happy home.

THE PROUD KING

From just outside loud mocking merriment
He heard midst this ; and therewithal a squire
Came hurrying up, his laughter scarcely spent,
Who said, " My lord, a man in such attire
As Adam's, ere he took the devil's hire,
Who saith that thou wilt know him for the King,
Up from the gate John Porter needs must bring.

" He to the King is nothing like in aught
But that his beard he weareth in such guise
As doth my lord : wilt thou that he be brought?
Perchance some treason 'neath his madness lies."
" Yea," saith the ranger, " that may well be wise.
But haste, for now am I right well at ease,
Nor would be wearied with such folk as these."

Then went the squire, and coming back again,
The porter and the naked King brought in,
Who thinking now that this should end his pain,
Forgot his fury and the porter's sin,
And said, " Thou wonderest how I came to win
This raiment, that kings long have ceased to wear,
Since Noah's flood has altered all the air ?

" Well, thou shalt know, but first I pray thee, Hugh,
Reach me that cloak that lieth on the board,
For certes, though thy folk are leal and true,
It seemeth that they deem a mighty lord
Is made by crown, and silken robe, and sword ;
Lo, such are borel folk ; but thou and I
Fail not to know the signs of majesty.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

"Thou risest not! thou lookest strange on me!
Ah, what is this? Who reigneth in my stead?
How long hast thou been plotting secretly?
Then slay me now, for if I be not dead
Armies will rise up when I nod my head.
Slay me!—or cast thy treachery away,
And have anew my favour from this day."

"Why should I tell thee that thou ne'er wast king?
The ranger said, "thou knowest not my mind;
Poor man, I pray God help thee in this thing,
And, ere thou diest send thee days more kind;
And help from us a-going shalt thou find.
Good fellows, this poor creature is but mad,
Take him, and in a coat let him be clad;

"And give him meat and drink, and on this night
Beneath some roof of ours let him abide,
For some day God may set his folly right."
Then spread the King his arms abroad and cried,
"Woe to thy food, thy house, and thee betide,
Thou loathsome traitor! Get ye from the hall,
Lest smitten by God's hand this roof should fall;

"Yea, if the world be but an idle dream,
And God deals nought with it, yet shall ye see
Red flame from out these carven windows stream.
I, I, will burn this vile place utterly,
And strew with salt the poisonous earth shall be,
That such a wretch of such a man has made,
That so such Judases may grow afraid."

THE PROUD KING

Thus raving, those who held him he shook off
And rushed from out the hall, nigh mad indeed,
And gained the gate, not heeding blow or scoff,
Nor longer of his nakedness took heed,
But ran, he knew not where, at headlong speed
Till, when at last his strength was fully spent,
Worn out, he fell beneath a woody bent.

But for the ranger, left alone in peace,
He bade his folk bring in the minstrelsy;
And thinking of his life, and fair increase
Of all his goods, a happy man was he,
And towards his master felt right lovingly,
And said, "This luckless madman will avail
When next I see the King for one more tale."

MEANWHILE Jovinian by the roadside lay,
Panting, confused, scarce knowing if he dreamed,
Until at last, when vanished was the day,
Through the dark night far off a bright light gleamed;
Which growing quickly, down the road there streamed
The glare of torches, held by men who ran
Before the litter of a mighty man.

These mixed with soldiers soon the road did fill,
And on their harness could the King behold
The badge of one erst wont to do his will,
A counsellor, a gatherer-up of gold,
Who, underneath his rule had now grown old:
Then wrath and bitterness so filled his heart,
That from his wretched lair he needs must start.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And o'er the clatter shrilly did he cry,
"Well met, Duke Peter! ever art thou wise;
Surely thou wilt not let a day go by
Ere thou art good friends with mine enemies;
O fit to rule within a land of lies,
Go on thy journey, make thyself more meet
To sit in hell beneath the devil's feet!"

But as he ceased a soldier drew anear,
And smote him flatling with his sheathed sword,
And said, "Speak louder, that my lord may hear
And give thee wages for thy ribald word!
Come forth, for I must show thee to my lord,
For he may think thee more than mad indeed,
Who of men's ways has taken wondrous heed."

Now was the litter stayed midmost the road,
And round about, the torches in a ring
Were gathered, and their flickering light now glowed
In gold and gems and many a lordly thing,
And showed that face well known unto the King,
That, smiling yesterday, right humble words
Had spoken midst the concourse of the lords.

But now he said, "Man, thou wert cursing me
If these folk heard aright; what wilt thou then,
Deem'st thou that I have done some wrong to thee,
Or hast thou scathe from any of my men?
In any case tell all thy tale again
When on the judgment-seat thou see'st me sit,
And I will give no careless ear to it."

THE PROUD KING

"The night is dark, and in the summer wind
The torches flicker ; canst thou see my face ?
Bid them draw nigher yet, and call to mind
Who gave thee all thy riches and thy place—
—Well ;—if thou canst, deny me, with such grace
As by the fire-light Peter swore of old,
When in that Maundy-week the night was cold—

"—Alas ! canst thou not see I am the King ?"
So spoke he, as their eyes met midst the blaze,
And the King saw the dread foreshadowing
Within the elder's proud and stony gaze,
Of what those lips, thin with the lapse of days,
Should utter now ; nor better it befell ;—
"Friend, a strange story thou art pleased to tell ;

"Thy luck it is thou tellest it to me,
Who deem thee mad and let thee go thy way :
The King is not a man to pity thee,
Or on thy folly thy fool's tale to lay :
Poor fool ! take this, and with the light of day
Buy food and raiment of some labouring clown,
And by my counsel keep thee from the town,

"For fear thy madness break out in some place
Where folk thy body to the judge must hale,
And then indeed wert thou in evil case—
Press on, sirs ! or the time will not avail."
—There stood the King, with limbs that 'gan to fail,
Speechless, and holding in his trembling hand
A coin new stamped for people of the land ;

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Thereon, with sceptre, crown, and royal robe,
The image of a King, himself, was wrought;
His jewelled feet upon a quartered globe,
As though by him all men were vain and nought.
One moment the red glare the silver caught,
As the lord ceased, the next his hurrying folk
The flaring circle round the litter broke.

The next, their shadows barred a patch of light,
Fast vanishing, all else around was black;
And the poor wretch, left lonely with the night,
Muttered, "I wish the day would ne'er come back,
If all that once I had I now must lack:
Ah God! how long is it since I was King,
Nor lacked enough to wish for anything?"

Then down the lonely road he wandered yet,
Following the vanished lights, he scarce knew why,
Till he began his sorrows to forget,
And, steeped in drowsiness, at last drew nigh
A grassy bank, where, worn with misery,
He slept the dreamless sleep of weariness,
That many a time such wretches' eyes will bless.

BUT at the dawn he woke, nor knew at first
What ugly chain of grief had brought him there,
Nor why he felt so wretched and accursed;
At last remembering, the fresh morning air,
The rising sun, and all things fresh and fair,
Yet caused some little hope in him to rise,
That end might come to these new miseries.

THE PROUD KING

So looking round about, he saw that he
To his own city gates was come anear ;
Then he arose and going warily,
And hiding now and then for very fear
Of folk who bore their goods and country cheer,
Unto the city's market, at the last
Unto a stone's-throw of the gate he passed.

But when he drew unto the very gate,
Into the throng of country-folk he came
Who for the opening of the door did wait,
Of whom some mocked, and some cried at him shame,
And some would know his country and his name ;
But one into his waggon drew him up,
And gave him milk from out a beechen cup,

And asked him of his name and misery ;
Then in his throat a swelling passion rose,
Which yet he swallowed down, and, "Friend," said he,
"Last night I had the hap to meet the foes
Of God and man, who robbed me, and with blows
Stripped off my weed and left me on the way :
Thomas the Pilgrim am I called to-day.

"A merchant am I of another town,
And rich enow to pay thee for thy deed,
If at the King's door thou wilt set me down,
For there a squire I know, who at my need
Will give me food and drink, and fitting weed.
What is thy name? in what place dost thou live?
That I some day great gifts to thee may give."

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

"Fair sir," the carle said, "I am poor enow,
Though certes food I lack not easily;
My name is Christopher a-Green; I sow
A little orchard set with bush and tree,
And ever there the kind land keepeth me,
For I, now fifty, from a little boy
Have dwelt thereon, and known both grief and joy.

"The house my grandsire built there has grown old,
And certainly a bounteous gift it were
If thou shouldst give me just enough of gold
To build it new; nor shouldst thou lack my prayer
For such a gift." "Nay, friend, have thou no care,"
The King said: "this is but a little thing
To me, who oft am richer than the King."

Now as they talked the gate was opened wide,
And toward the palace went they through the street,
And Christopher walked ever by the side
Of his rough wain, where midst the May-flowers sweet
Jovinian lay, that folk whom they might meet
Might see him not to mock at his bare skin:
So shortly to the King's door did they win.

Then through the open gate Jovinian ran
Of the first court, and no man stayed him there;
But as he reached the second gate, a man
Of the King's household, seeing him all bare
And bloody, cried out, "Whither dost thou fare?
Sure thou art seventy times more mad than mad,
Or else some magic potion thou hast had,

THE PROUD KING

"Whereby thou fear'st not steel or anything."
"But," said the King, "good fellow, I know thee;
And can it be thou knowest not thy King?
Nay, thou shalt have a good reward of me,
That thou wouldst rather have than ten years' fee,
If thou wilt clothe me in fair weed again,
For now to see my council am I fain."

"Out, ribald!" quoth the fellow: "What say'st thou?
Thou art my lord, whom God reward and bless?
Truly before long shalt thou find out how
John Hangman cureth ill folk's wilfulness;
Yea, from his scourge the blood has run for less
Than that which now thou sayest: nay, what say I?
For lighter words have I seen tall men die."

"Come now, the sergeants to this thing shall see!"
So to the guard-room was Jovinian brought,
Where his own soldiers mocked him bitterly,
And all his desperate words they heeded nought;
Until at last there came to him this thought,
That never from this misery should he win,
But, spite of all his struggles, die therein.

And terrible it seemed, that everything
So utterly was changed since yesterday,
That these who were the soldiers of the King,
Ready to lie down in the common way
Before him, nor durst rest if he bade play,
Now stood and mocked him, knowing not the face
At whose command each man there had his place.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

"Ah, God!" said he, "is this another earth
From that whereon I stood two days ago?
Or else in sleep have I had second birth?
Or among mocking shadows do I go,
Unchanged myself of flesh and fell, although
My fair weed I have lost and royal gear?
And meanwhile all are changed that meet me here;

"And yet in heart and nowise outwardly."
Amid his wretched thoughts two sergeants came,
Who said, "Hold, sirs! because the King would see
The man who thus so rashly brings him shame,
By taking his high style and spotless name,
That never has been questioned ere to-day.
Come, fool! needs is it thou must go our way."

So at the sight of him all men turned round,
As 'twixt these two across the courts he went,
With downcast head and hands together bound;
While from the windows maid and varlet leant,
And through the morning air fresh laughter sent;
Until unto the threshold they were come
Of the great hall within that kingly home.

Therewith right fast Jovinian's heart must beat,
As now he thought, "Lo, here shall end the strife;
For either shall I sit on mine own seat,
Known unto all, soldier and lord and wife,
Or else is this the ending of my life,
And no man henceforth shall remember me,
And a vain name in records shall I be."

THE PROUD KING

Therewith he raised his head up, and beheld
One clad in gold set on his royal throne,
Gold-crowned, whose hand the ivory sceptre held ;
And underneath him sat the Queen alone,
Ringed round with standing lords, of whom not one
Did aught but utmost reverence unto him ;
Then did Jovinian shake in every limb.

Yet midst amaze and rage to him it seemed
This man was nowise like him in the face ;
But with a marvellous glory his head gleamed,
As though an angel sat in that high place,
Where erst he sat like all his royal race,—
—But their eyes met, and with a stern, calm brow
The shining one cried out, “ And where art thou ?

“ Where art thou, robber of my majesty ? ”
“ Was I not King,” he said, “ but yesterday ?
And though to-day folk give my place to thee,
I am Jovinian ; yes, though none gainsay,
If on these very stones thou shouldst me slay,
And though no friend be left for me to moan,
I am Jovinian still, and King alone.”

Then said that other, “ O thou foolish man,
King was I yesterday, and long before,
Nor is my name aught but Jovinian,
Whom in this house the Queen my mother bore,
Unto my longing father, for right sore
Was I desired before I saw the light ;
Thou, fool, art first to speak against my right.

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

"And surely well thou meritest to die ;
Yet ere I bid men lead thee unto death
Hearken to these my lords that stand anigh,
And what this faithful Queen beside me saith,
Then may'st thou many a year hence draw thy breath,
If these should stammer in their speech one whit :
Behold this face, lords, look ye well on it !

"Thou, O fair Queen, say now whose face is this !"
Then cried they, "Hail, O Lord Jovinian !
Long may'st thou live !" and the Queen knelt to kiss
His gold-shod feet, and through her face there ran
Sweet colour, as she said, "Thou art the man
By whose side I have lain for many a year,
Thou art my lord Jovinian lief and dear."

Then said he, "O thou wretch, hear now and see !
What thing should hinder me to slay thee now ?
And yet indeed, such mercy is in me,
If thou wilt kneel down humbly and avow
Thou art no King, but base-born, as I know
Thou art indeed, in mine house shalt thou live,
And as thy service is, so shalt thou thrive."

But the unhappy King laughed bitterly,
The red blood rose to flush his visage wan
Where erst the grey of death began to be ;
"Thou liest," he said, "I am Jovinian,
Come of great kings ; nor am I such a man
As still to live when all delight is gone,
As thou might'st do, who sittest on my throne."

THE PROUD KING

No answer made the other for a while,
But sat and gazed upon him steadfastly,
Until across his face there came a smile,
Where scorn seemed mingled with some great pity.
And then he said, "Nathless thou shalt not die,
But live on as thou mayst, a lowly man,
Forgetting thou wast once Jovinian."

Then wildly round the hall Jovinian gazed,
Turning about to many a well-known face,
But none of all his folk seemed grieved or mazed,
But stood unmoved, each in his wonted place;
There were the Lords, the Marshal with his mace,
The Chamberlain, the Captain of the Guard,
Grey-headed, with his wrinkled face and hard,

That had peered down so many a lane of war;
There stood the grave ambassadors arow,
Come from half-conquered lands; without the bar
The foreign merchants gazed upon the show,
Willing new things of that great land to know;
Nor was there any doubt in any man
That the gold throne still held Jovinian.

Yea, as the sergeants laid their hands on him,
The mighty hound that crouched before the throne,
Flew at him fain to tear him limb from limb,
Though in the woods, the brown bear's dying groan,
He and that beast had often heard alone.
"Ah!" muttered he, "take thou thy wages too;
Worship the risen sun as these men do."

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

They thrust him out, and as he passed the door,
The murmur of the stately court he heard
Behind him, and soft footfalls on the floor,
And, though by this somewhat his skin was scared,
Hung back at the rough eager wind afeard ;
But from the place they dragged him through the gate,
Wherethrough he oft had rid in royal state.

Then down the streets they led him, where of old,
He, coming back from some well-finished war,
Had seen the line of flashing steel and gold
Wind upwards 'twixt the houses from the bar,
While clashed the bells from wreathed spires afar ;
Now moaning, as they haled him on, he said,
"God and the world against one lonely head !"

BUT soon, the bar being past they loosed their hold,
And said, "Thus saith by us our Lord the King,
Dwell now in peace, but yet be not so bold
To come again, or to thy lies to cling,
Lest unto thee there fall a worser thing ;
And for ourselves we bid thee ever pray
For him who has been good to thee this day."

Therewith they turned away into the town,
And still he wandered on and knew not where,
Till, stumbling at the last, he fell adown,
And looking round beheld a brook right fair,
That ran in pools and shallows here and there,
And on the farther side of it a wood,
Nigh which a lowly clay-built hovel stood.

THE PROUD KING

Gazing thereat, it came into his mind
A priest dwelt there, a hermit wise and old,
Whom he had ridden oftentimes to find,
In days when first the sceptre he did hold,
And unto whom his mind he oft had told,
And had good counsel from him, though indeed
A scanty crop had sprung from that good seed.

Therefore he passed the brook with heavy cheer
And toward the little house went speedily,
And at the door knocked, trembling with his fear,
Because he thought, "Will he remember me?
If not, within me must there surely be
Some devil who turns everything to ill,
And makes my wretched body do his will."

So, while such doleful things as this he thought,
There came unto the door the holy man,
Who said, "Good friend, what tidings hast thou
brought?"
"Father," he said, "knowest thou Jovinian?
Know'st thou me not, made naked, poor, and wan?
Alas, O father! am I not the King,
The rightful lord of thee and everything?"

"Nay, thou art mad to tell me such a tale!"
The hermit said; "if thou seek'st soul's health here,
Right little will such words as this avail;
It were a better deed to shrive thee clear,
And take the pardon Christ has bought so dear,
Than to an ancient man such mocks to say
That would be fitter for a Christmas play."

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

So to his hut he got him back again,
And fell the unhappy King upon his knees,
And unto God at last he did complain,
Saying, "Lord God, what bitter things are these?
What hast thou done, that every man that sees
This wretched body, of my death is fain?
O Lord God, give me back myself again!

"E'en if therewith I needs must die straightway.
Indeed I know that since upon the earth
I first did go, I ever day by day
Have grown the worse, who was of little worth
E'en at the best time since my helpless birth.
And yet it pleased thee once to make me King,
Why hast thou made me now this wretched thing?

"Why am I hated so of every one?
Wilt thou not let me live my life again,
Forgetting all the deeds that I have done,
Forgetting my old name, and honours vain,
That I may cast away this lonely pain?
Yet if thou wilt not, help me in this strife,
That I may pass my little span of life,

"Not made a monster by unhappiness.
What shall I say? thou mad'st me weak of will,
Thou wrapped'st me in ease and carelessness,
And yet, as some folk say, thou lovest me still;
Look down, of folly I have had my fill,
And am but now as first thou madest me,
Weak, yielding clay to take impress of thee."

THE PROUD KING

So said he weeping, and but scarce had done,
When yet again came forth that hermit old,
And said, "Alas! my master and my son,
Is this a dream my wearied eyes behold?
What doleful wonder now shall I be told,
'Of that ill world that I so long have left?
What thing thy glory from thee has bereft?"

A strange surprise of joy therewith there came
To that worn heart; he said, "For some great sin
The Lord my God has brought me unto shame;
I am unknown of servants, wife, and kin,
Unknown of all the lords that stand within
My father's house; nor didst thou know me more
When e'en just now I stood before thy door.

"Now since thou know'st me, surely God is good,
And will not slay me, and good hope I have
Of help from Him that died upon the rood,
And is a mighty lord to slay and save:
So now again these blind men will I brave;
If thou wilt give me of thy poorest weed,
And some rough food, the which I sorely need;

"Then of my sins thou straight shalt shrive me clean."
Then weeping said the holy man, "Dear lord,
What heap of woes upon thine head has been;
Enter, O King, take this rough gown and cord,
And what scant food my hovel can afford;
And tell me everything thou hast to say;
And then the High God speed thee on thy way."

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

So when in coarse serge raiment he was clad,
He told him all that pride had made him think ;
And showed him of his life both good and bad ;
And then being houselled, did he eat and drink,
While in the wise man's heart his words did sink,
For, "God be praised !" he thought, "I am no king,
Who scarcely shall do right in anything !"

Then he made ready for the King his ass,
And bade again, God speed him on the way,
And down the road the King made haste to pass
As it was growing toward the end of day,
With sober joy for troubles passed away ;
But trembling still, as onward he did ride,
Meeting few folk upon that even-tide.

SO to the city gate being come at last,
He noted there two ancient warders stand,
Whereof one looked askance as he went past,
And whispered low behind his held-up hand
Unto his mate, "The King, who gave command
That if disguised this eve he pass this gate,
No reverence we should do his kingly state."

Thereat with joy, Jovinian smiled again,
And so passed onward quickly down the street ;
And well-nigh was he eased of all his pain
When he beheld the folk that he might meet
Gaze hard at him, as though they fain would greet
His well-known face, but durst not, knowing well
He would not any of his state should tell.

THE PROUD KING

Withal unto the palace being come,
He lighted down thereby and entered,
And once again it seemed his royal home,
For folk again before him bowed the head ;
And to him came a Squire, who softly said,
"The Queen awaits thee, O my lord the King,
Within the little hall where minstrels sing,

"Since there thou badst her meet thee on this night."
"Lead on then !" said the King, and in his heart
He said, "Perfay all goeth more than right
And I am King again ;" but with a start
He thought of him who played the kingly part
That morn, yet said, "If God will have it so
This man like all the rest my face will know."

So in the Little Hall the Queen he found,
Asleep, as one a spell binds suddenly ;
For her fair broidery lay upon the ground,
And in her lap her open hand did lie,
The silken-threaded needle close thereby ;
And by her stood that image of the King
In rich apparel, crown and signet-ring.

But when the King stepped forth with angry eye
And would have spoken, came a sudden light,
And changed was that other utterly ;
For he was clad in robe of shining white,
Inwrought with flowers of unnamed colours bright,
Girt with a marvellous girdle, and whose hem
Fell to his naked feet and shone in them,

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

And from his shoulders did two wings arise,
That with the swaying of his body, played
This way and that; of strange and lovely dyes
Their feathers were, and wonderfully made:
And now he spoke, "O King, be not dismayed,
Or think my coming here so strange to be,
For oft ere this have I been close to thee.

"And now thou knowest in how short a space
The God that made the world can unmake thee,
And though He alter in no whit thy face,
Can make all folk forget thee utterly,
That thou to-day a nameless wretch mayst be,
Who yesterday woke up without a peer,
The wide world's marvel and the people's fear.

"Behold, thou oughtest to thank God for this,
That on the hither side of thy dark grave
Thou well hast learned how great a God He is
Who from the heavens such countless rebels drave,
Yet turns himself such folk as thee to save;
For many a man thinks nought at all of it.
Till in a darksome land he comes to sit,

"Lamenting everything: so do not thou!
For inasmuch as thou thoughtst not to die
This thing may happen to thee even now,
Because the day unspeakable draws nigh,
When bathed in unknown flame all things shall lie;
And if thou art upon God's side that day,
Unslain, thine earthly part shall pass away.

THE PROUD KING

"Or if thy body in the grave must rot,
Well mayst thou see how small a thing is this,
Whose pain of yesterday now hurts thee not,
Now thou hast come again to earthly bliss,
Though bitter-sweet thou knowest well this is,
And though no coming day can ever see
Ending of happiness where thou may'st be.

"Now must I go, nor wilt thou see me more,
Until the day, when, unto thee at least
This world is gone, and an unmeasured shore,
Where all is wonderful and changed, thou seest :
Therefore, farewell ! at council and at feast
Thy nobles shalt thou meet as thou hast done,
Nor wilt thou more be strange to any one."

So scarce had he done speaking, ere his wings
Within the doorway of the hall did gleam,
And then he vanished quite ; and all these things
Unto Jovinian little more did seem
Than some distinct and well-remembered dream,
From which one wakes amidst a feverish night,
Taking the moonshine for the morning light.

Silent he stood, not moving for a while,
Pondering o'er all these wondrous things, until
The Queen arose from sleep, and with a smile,
Said, "O fair lord, your great men by your will
E'en as I speak the banquet-chamber fill,
To greet thee amidst joy and revelling,
Wilt thou not therefore meet them as a King?"

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

So from that place of marvels having gone,
Half mazed, he soon was clad in rich array,
And sat thereafter on his kingly throne,
As though no other had sat there that day ;
Nor did a soul of all his household say
A word about the man, who on that morn
Had stood there, naked, helpless, and forlorn.

But ever day by day the thought of it
Within Jovinian's heart the clearer grew,
As o'er his head the ceaseless time did flit,
And everything still towards its ending drew,
New things becoming old, and old things new ;
Till, when a moment of eternity
Had passed, grey-headed did Jovinian lie

One sweet May morning, wakeful in his bed ;
And thought, " That day is thirty years a-gone
Since useless folly came into my head,
Whereby, before the steps of mine own throne,
I stood in helpless agony alone,
And of the wondrous things that there befell,
When I am gone there will be none to tell :

" No man is now alive who thinks that he,
Who bade thrust out the madman on that tide,
Was other than the King they used to see :
Long years have passed now, since the hermit died
So must I tell the tale, ere by his side
I lie, lest it be unrecorded quite,
Like a forgotten dream in morning light.

THE PROUD KING

“Yea, lest I die ere night come, this same day
Unto some scribe will I tell everything,
That it may lie when I am gone away,
Stored up within the archives of the King;
And may God grant the words thereof may ring
Like His own voice in the next comer's ears!
Whereby his folk shall shed the fewer tears.”

So it was done, and at the King's command
A clerk that day did note it every whit,
And after by a man of skilful hand
In golden letters fairly was it writ;
Yet little heed the new King took of it
That filled the throne when King Jovinian died,
So much did all things feed his swelling pride.

But whether God chastised him in his turn,
And he grew wise thereafter, I know not;
I think by eld alone he came to learn
How lowly on some day must be his lot.
But ye, O Kings, think all that ye have got
To be but gawds cast out upon some heap,
And stolen the while the Master was asleep.

THE story done, for want of happier things,
Some men must even fall to talk of kings;
Some trouble of a far-off Grecian isle,
Some hard Sicilian craftsman's cruel guile
Whereby he raised himself to be as God,
Till good men slew him; the fell Persian rod

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

As blighting as the deadly pestilence ;
The brazen net of armed men from whence
Was no escape ; the fir-built Norway hall
Filled with the bonders waiting for the fall
Of the great roof whereto the torch is set ;
The laughing mouth, beneath the eyes still wet
With more than sea-spray, as the well-loved land
The freeman still looks back on, while his hand
Clutches the tiller, and the eastern breeze
Grows fresh and fresher : many things like these
They talked about, till' they seemed young again,
Remembering what a glory and a gain
Their fathers deemed the death of kings to be.

And yet amidst it, some smiled doubtfully
For thinking how few men escape the yoke,
From this or that man's hand, and how most folk
Must needs be kings and slaves the while they live,
And take from this man, and to that man give
Things hard enow. Yet as they mused, again
The minstrels raised some high heroic strain
That led men on to battle in old times ;
And midst the glory of its mingling rhymes,
Their hard hearts softened, and strange thoughts arose
Of some new end to all life's cruel foes.

END OF VOL. I

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